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# THE MESSAGE OF OUR MASTER

*(By the first disciples of Shri Ramakrishna)*



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Sri Ramakrishna

## **THE AIM OF RELIGION**

The old dilemma whether the tree precedes the seed or the seed the tree, runs through all our forms of knowledge. Whether intelligence is first in the order of being or matter ; whether the idea is first or the external manifestation ; whether freedom is our true nature or bondage of law ; whether thought creates matter or matter thought ; whether the incessant change in nature precedes the idea of rest or the idea of rest precedes the idea of change ; all these are questions of the same insoluble nature. Like the rise and fall of a series of waves, they follow one another in an invariable succession and men take this side or that according to their tastes or education or peculiarity of temperaments.

For instance, if it be said, on the one hand, that seeing the adjustment in nature of different parts, it is clear that it is the effect of intelligent work, on the other hand it may be argued that intelligence itself, being created by matter and force in the course of evolution, could not have been before this world. If it be said that the production of every form

must be preceded by an idea in the mind, it can be argued with equal force, that the idea was itself created by various external experiences. On the one hand, the appeal is to our ever-present idea of freedom ; on the other, to the fact that nothing in the universe being causless, everything, both mental and physical, is rigidly bound by the law of causation. If it be affirmed that, seeing the changes of the body induced by volition, it is evident that thought is the creator of this body, it is equally clear that as change in the body induces a change in the thought, the body must have produced the mind. If it be argued that the universal change must be the outcome of a preceding rest, equally logical argument can be adduced to show that the idea of unchangeability is only an illusory relative notion, brought about by the comparative differences in motion.

Thus in the ultimate analysis all knowledge resolves itself into this vicious circle, the indeterminate interdependence of cause and effect. Judging by the laws of reasoning, such knowledge is incorrect ; and the most curious fact is that this knowledge is proved to be incorrect, not by comparison with knowledge which is true, but by the very laws which depend for their basis upon the self-

same vicious circles. It is clear, therefore, that the peculiarity of all our knowledge is that it proves its own insufficiency. Again, we cannot say that it is unreal, for all the reality we know and can think of is within this knowledge. Nor can we deny that it is sufficient for all practical purposes. This state of human knowledge which embraces within its scope both the external and the internal worlds is called Mâyâ. It is unreal because it proves its own incorrectness. It is real in the sense of being sufficient for all the needs of the animal man.

Acting in the external world Maya manifests itself as the two powers of attraction and repulsion. In the internal its manifestations are desire and non-desire (Pravritti and Nivritti). The whole universe is trying to rush outwards. Each atom is trying to fly off from its centre. In the internal world, each thought is trying to go beyond control. Again each particle in the external world is checked by another force, the centripetal, and drawn towards the centre. Similarly in the thought-world the controlling power is checking all these outgoing desires.

Desires of materialisation, that is, being dragged down more and more to the plane of mechanical action, belong to the animal man.

It is only when the desire to prevent all such bondage to the senses arises that religion dawns in the heart of man. Thus we see that the whole scope of religion is to prevent man from falling into the bondage of the senses and to help him to assert his freedom. The first effort of this power of Nivritti towards that end is called morality. The scope of all morality is to prevent this degradation and break this bondage. All morality can be divided into the positive and the negative elements; it says either, "Do this" or "Do not do this." When it says, "Do not", it is evident that it is a check to a certain desire which would make a man a slave. When it says, "Do", its scope is to show the way to freedom and to the breaking down of a certain degradation which has already seized the human heart.

Now this morality is possible only if there be a liberty to be attained by man. Apart from the question of the chances of attaining perfect liberty, it is clear that the whole universe is a case of struggle to expand, or in other words, to attain liberty. This infinite space is not sufficient for even one atom. The struggle for expansion must go on eternally until perfect liberty is attained. It cannot be said that this struggle to gain

freedom is to avoid pain or to attain pleasure. The lowest grade of beings, who can have no such feeling, also are struggling for expansion and according to many, man himself is the expansion of these very beings.

## THE ESSENCE OF RELIGION

In France, the "rights of man" was long a watchword of the race; in America the rights of woman still beseech the public ear; in India we have concerned ourselves always with the rights of Gods.

The Vedânta includes all sects. We have a peculiar idea in India. Suppose I had a child; I should not teach him any religion, but the practice of concentrating his mind, and just one line of prayer. Not prayer in your sense, but this—"I meditate on Him who is the Creator of the universe; may He enlighten my mind."

Then, when old enough, he goes about hearing the different philosophies and teachings, till he finds that which seems to be the truth to him. He then becomes the Shishya, or disciple of the Guru (teacher) who is teaching that truth.

He may choose to worship Christ or Buddha or Mohammed: we recognise the rights of each of these, and the right of all souls to their own Ishta, or chosen way. It is therefore quite possible for my son to be a Buddhist, for my wife to be a Christian, and

for me to be a Mohammedan at one and the same time with absolute freedom from friction.

We are all glad to remember that all roads lead to God ; and that the reformation of the world does not depend upon all seeing God through our eyes. Our fundamental idea is that your doctrine cannot be mine, nor mine yours. I am my own sect. It is true that we have created a system of religion in India which we believe to be the only rational religious system extant ; but our belief in its rationality rests upon its inclusion of all the searchers after God, its absolute charity towards all forms of worship, and its eternal receptivity of those ideas tending towards the evolution of God in the universe.

We admit the imperfection of our system, because the reality must be beyond all systems ; and in this admission lies the portent and promise of an eternal growth. Sects, ceremonies, and books, so far as they are the means of a man's realising his own nature, are all right. When he has realised that he gives up everything.

"I reject the Vedas !" is the last word of the Vedânta philosophy. Rituals, hymns, and scriptures through which a man has travelled to freedom vanish for him.

"So'ham, So'ham"—I am He, I am He—bursts forth from his lips, and for him to say "Thou" to God is blasphemy, for he is "one with the Father".

Personally, I take as much of the Vedas as agrees with reason. Parts of the Vedas are apparently contradictory. They are not considered as inspired in the Western sense of the word, but as the sum total of the knowledge of God—omniscience which we possess. But to say that only those books which we call the Vedas contain this knowledge is mere sophistry. We know it is shared in varying degrees by the scriptures of all sects. Manu says that that part only of the Vedas which agrees with reason is the Vedas ; and many of our philosophers have taken this view. Of all the scriptures of the world, it is the Vedas alone which declare that the study of the Vedas is secondary.

The real study is that "by which we realise the Unchangeable", and that is realised neither by reading, nor believing, nor reasoning, but by superconscious perception and Samâdhi. When a man has reached that perfect state, he is of the same nature as the Personal God. "I and my Father are one." He knows himself to be one with Brahman, the Absolute, and projects himself, as does

the Personal God. The Personal God is the Absolute looked at through the haze of Maya—ignorance.

When we approach Him with the five senses, we can only see Him as the Personal God. The idea is that the Self cannot be objectified. How can the knower know himself? But he can cast a shadow, as it were, and the highest form of that shadow, that attempt at objectifying one's Self, is the Personal God. The Self is the eternal subject, and we are eternally struggling to objectify that Self; and out of that struggle has come this phenomenon of the universe—that which we call matter. But these are weak attempts, and the highest objectification of the Self possible to us, is the Personal God.

"An honest God's the noblest work of man", said one of your Western thinkers; God is as man is. No man can see God but through these human manifestations. Talk as you may, try as you may, you cannot think of God but as a man; and as you are, so He is. An ignorant man was asked to make an image of the God Shiva; and after many days of hard struggle he succeeded in manufacturing only the image of a monkey! So, when we try to think of God as He is in His absolute perfection, we meet with misera-

ble failure, because we are limited and bound by our present constitution to see God as man.

If buffaloes desire to worship God, they, in keeping with their own nature, will see Him as a huge buffalo; if a fish wishes to worship God, its concept of Him will inevitably be that of a big fish; and man must think of Him as man.

Suppose man, the buffalo, and the fish represent so many different vessels; that all these vessels go to the sea of God to be filled, each according to its shape and capacity. In man the water takes the shape of man; in the buffalo the shape of a buffalo; and in the fish the shape of a fish; but in each of these vessels is the same water of the sea of God.

Two kinds of men do not worship God as man—the human brute who has no religion, and the Paramahamsa who has transcended the limits of his own human nature. He to whom all nature has become his own Self, can alone worship God as He is. The human brute does not worship because of his ignorance, and the Jivanmuktas (free souls) do not worship because they have realised God in themselves. “So’ham, So’ham”—I am He—they say, and how shall they worship themselves?

I will tell you a short story. There was once a baby lion left by its dying mother among some sheep. The sheep fed it and gave it shelter. The lion grew apace and said, "Ba-a-a", when the sheep said, "Ba-a-a". One day another lion came by.

"What do you do here?" said the second lion in astonishment: for he heard the sheep-lion bleating with the rest.

"Ba-a-a", said the other, "I am a little sheep, I am a little sheep, I am frightened."

"Nonsense!" roared the second lion; "come with me; I will show you your true nature." And he took him to the side of a smooth stream and showed him his own image therein. "You are a lion; look at me, look at the sheep, look at yourself."

And the sheep-lion looked, and then he said, "Ba—, I do not look like the sheep—it is true, I am a lion!" and with that he roared a roar that shook the hills to their depths.

That is it. We are lions in sheep's clothing of habit, we are hypnotised into weakness by our surroundings, and the province of Vedanta is the dehypnotisation of the Self. The goal to be reached is freedom. I disagree with the idea that freedom is obedience to the laws of nature. I do not understand

what that means. According to the history of human progress, it is disobedience to nature that has constituted that progress. It may be said that the conquest of lower laws was through the higher, but even there the conquering mind was still seeking freedom; as soon as it found the struggle was through law, it wished to conquer that also. So the ideal is always freedom. The trees never disobey law. I never saw a cow steal. An oyster never told a lie. Yet these are not greater than man.

Obedience to law, in the last issue, would make of us simply matter—whether in society, or in politics, or in religion. This life is a tremendous assertion of freedom; excess of laws means death. No nation possesses so many laws as the Hindus and the result is national death. But the Hindus had one peculiar idea—they never made any doctrines or dogmas in religion; and the latter has had the greatest growth. Therein are we practical, wherein you are impractical—in religion.

A few men come together in America and say, "We will have a joint-stock company" and in five minutes it is done. In India twenty men may discuss a joint-stock company for as many weeks and it may not be formed; but if one believes that by holding

up his hands in the air for forty years he will attain wisdom, it will be done! So we are practical in our way, and you in yours.

But the way of all ways to realisation is love. When one loves the Lord the whole universe becomes dear to him, because it is all His. "Everything is His, and He is my Lover; I love Him," says the Bhakta. In this way everything becomes sacred to the Bhakta, because all things are His. How, then, may we hurt any one? How, then, may we not love another? With the love of God will come, as its effect, the love of every one in the long run. The nearer we approach God, the more do we begin to see that all things abide in Him. Our heart will become a perennial fountain of love. Man is transformed in the presence of this light of love and realises at last the beautiful and inspiring truth that love, lover, and the beloved are really one.

## **THE SPIRITUAL ASPIRANT AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES**

If we want to be spiritual, we must first have a clear conception of what is Sâdhanâ or spiritual practice. Wrong notions of spiritual life prevail among people. It is seen that most of the so-called spiritual men of the day, in their zeal to attain something supernatural, take recourse to certain kinds of practices that are neither conducive to the spiritual growth of men nor are healthy to life, and thus forgetting the ideal, they cut themselves off from the string of real life. Some are so self-deluded as to think that spiritual life consists in the observances of certain external ceremonials and local customs (Âchâras) coupled with physical austerities. Sometimes even mystery-mongering passes for real spirituality. Again, the practices that have been enjoined by the sages upon particular individuals to free themselves from their respective evil habits and tendencies are often preached universally as real Sadhana to be practised by all. There are people again who ruin themselves by pursuing the mistaken idea that they can bring God under

control to serve their selfish ends of sensuality by the powers of Mantras or some kinds of practices, even as the snake is charmed by incantations. So it will not be out of place to give here some truths about real spirituality as discovered by the great saints and sages of India after their lifelong struggle and strenuous Sadhana.

Shri Ramakrishna used to say, "To see God in all is the last word on spirituality." And indeed this blessed vision dawns, when man reaches the climax of Sadhana. The Hindu scriptures (*Shâstras*) also testify to this. The *Shastras* declare, "All is Brahman ; all the various objects, gross or subtle, conscious or unconscious, men, animals, birds, trees, plants, etc.—all that you see in this universe are but that One Indivisible Brahman." That Brahman alone you sense in various forms and in diverse ways. Though all the time you live and move in Him and hold your life's daily dealings only with Him, yet you are not aware of it, and you think you are doing so with different people and diverse objects.

But why is this not realised ?

You cannot realise the truth as you are in the midst of error. So long as the mist is not cleared away, the mistake cannot be

found out. Error is detected only when it is compared with truth.

And the cause of the mistake here, as everywhere else, is ignorance. How and when this has begun, nobody can say; and any attempt to know its origin is futile so long as one is in ignorance. Dreams appear as true as long as you are dreaming. Only when compared with the waking state, after the sleep is broken, do they appear as false. Well, there may be some stray instances when people realise even in dreams that they are dreaming. But even that consciousness is due to the lingering memory of the waking state. And instances are not wanting to show that at times there lingers the memory of the highest consciousness of the One Indivisible Brahman as experienced in Samâdhi, even while one is perceiving the manifold universe in the waking state.

Drive out the ignorance, and the truth will be revealed unto you. The sages of yore realised the truth and have shown us the way how to get rid of nescience.

But still another doubt arises in the mind: What guarantee is there that the experience of the sages, who form a microscopic minority, is true, while the sensuous perceptions of the universe by all men are false? On the con-

trary can it not be a fact that those whom you call sages, are really deluded?

Well, truth is not to be judged by the *opinions* of the majority or the minority. Experience of the sages is accepted as true, for by that experience they were able to free themselves from all kinds of miseries, to become fearless and acquire eternal peace and blessedness. Moreover, they had thereby found out the secret purpose of all the struggles of mortal human life. Further, real knowledge gives a wonderful catholicity to man dowering him with all the excellences of the head and the heart, such as patience, contentment, kindness, humility, and so on. From the Shastras we learn that these sages attained such graces in their own lives, and even now we find that those who follow in their footsteps and attain the supreme knowledge, also get these qualities.

Again, the question may arise here: How can error be common and universal? The object that you or I experience as the cow, is so experienced by all. Nobody ever mistakes a cow for a man. It is not a little wonder then that all people commit the same mistake, and that at the same time. Our experience tells us that though a few may be wrong, yet there would be others who see the

reality. But here we find an exception to that general rule. How is it?

Well, you see the exception because you are not counting the sages in the category of men. The sages do not see the object as cow but see God instead. But as to the question, why all make the same mistake, the scriptures reply, "There is a Universal Mind, Sutrâtmâ, in which arise the diverse images of the various objects of the universe. And as the individual minds form part and parcel of that one Universal Mind, they share the common experience of the Universal." Hence the knowledge of external objects does not depend on our individual and subjective ideas, but it is due to the conception of the Cosmic Mind, and therefore we cannot see a cow as other than a cow. Again, for the same reason, even when some get emancipated from the thraldom of nescience, others remain still subject to the chimerical visions of the universe. But we must remember that though the Universal Soul in His Cosmic Mind has got the idea of the universe, He is not immersed in ignorance like ourselves, simply for the reason that He, being the Omniscient Lord, has the knowledge of the existence of One Impartite Brahman in and through this manifold universe. Shri Ra-

makrishna used to say, "The snake has poison in its fangs, but it is none the worse for it. The poison does not affect it or cause its death, although its bite kills others."

Thus we come to learn from the scriptures that the universe does not exist in reality apart from an idea in the Cosmic Mind. And it can also be said that the universe remains only as idea in the individual minds too ; for the Cosmic Mind is an organic whole and the individual minds are eternally connected with it even as the limbs are connected to the body. It cannot be affirmed that the idea of the universe did not exist before but entered there at some particular time. For what we call time and space or name and form, without which no idea of differentiation is possible, are ideas eternally connected with the idea of the universe. In other words the ideas of time and space cannot be separated from the idea of the universe in the Cosmic Mind. Therefore the Vedas and other Hindu scriptures have declared that Prakriti or Mâyâ, which causes this universe, is beginningless and beyond time. And the individual minds, as conditioned by this Maya from a beginningless time, have developed the notion of permanent reality about this world-idea ; and similarly having been deprived of

the vision of the Real, the one Brahman, from a beginningless time, they have become unable to detect the error in this experience of this world-vision and thus get rid of this delusion. For, as already stated, error is found out only when we come to know the truth.

Thus we see, if we want to know the truth of this universe, we must get beyond this universe of name and form, beyond all time, space, and causation, beyond all ideas and ideation, and have the blessed vision of that Transcendental Reality. The preparation and the struggle to attain to the realisation of that Reality are known in the Vedas and other scriptures as *Sadhana*. And he in whom this struggle exists, whether consciously or unconsciously, is known in India as a *Sâdhaka*.

Generally speaking, that struggle to know the Transcendental Reality has for long taken two courses. The first one, known in the *Shastras* as the process of "not this, not this", is the path of knowledge (*Jnâna*) which seeks to attain the goal by negating the unreal. And the other one, the process of "this, this", is the path of *Bhakti*. The *Sadhaka* of the path of knowledge is from the very beginning fully aware of the consummation of his path and tries to approximate to it by constant meditation upon the goal. While those who

take to the path of devotion (Bhakti) are in most cases ignorant of the highest end in the beginning but ultimately realise the same Transcendent Being by advancing step by step from one ideal to another. But in either case the angle of vision is changed and both have to renounce the feverish attachment for the world. But with the Jnâni the renunciation of everything commences from the very start, while the Bhakta begins by giving up little by little for the sake of his Beloved but finally ends in realising the same Reality, the one without a second, by renouncing all, like the Jnani. The scriptures define Vairâgya as the renunciation of that outlook on the world which is defiled by selfishness and sense-enjoyment.

Very easily arises the knowledge of the transiency of the world, when we begin to ponder over this ever-changing human life that ultimately ends in death. It seems therefore more possible that in ancient ages man found out the Reality, the First Cause, first through the path of knowledge by renouncing the popular view of the world and life that makes one forget the Reality. And for the same reason we find in the Upanishads that the highest development of the philosophy of Jnana was already arrived at even before the

full development of the different aspects of Bhakti was attained, though it is true that from the very beginning these two paths were in vogue.

We have ample evidence in the Upanishads of the fact that man soon became introspective as he proceeded with the analytical process of negation, the "not this, not this" process, in his search after the eternal First Cause. He soon realised that, more than any of the external objects, his own body and mind are instrumental in getting him tagged on to the phenomenal world and that, if properly directed, they would help him more in finding out that First Cause than all other external aids. "By examining a single grain in a ricepot, one can tell if the whole quantity is well-boiled or not." Similarly if one can find out the Eternal Being within one's own Self, one can see Him in all. Thus to a pursuer of the path of knowledge the only aim and ideal is to know the reality in him.

As has been already told, be one a Jnani or a Bhakta, one has to give up one's attachment to the world. When this renunciation becomes complete, the mind becomes free from all thought-waves and attains Samadhi. This kind of Samadhi is called Nirvikalpa Samadhi in the scriptures.

The Bhakta, though he perceives the transiency of the world, believes in a Personal God and therefore in the reality of the phenomenal world, His creation. All persons and objects are dear to him, as he finds them all connected with God. He renounces all those objects that blur his vision of the Beloved. His only aim and ideal is to merge himself in the love and thought of some particular aspect of God and when that is attained his whole life becomes an oblation on the altar of love for the Lord.

Now let us see how a Bhakta loses himself in the one thought of his Beloved and forgets the existence of the outside world and ultimately reaches the state of Nirvikalpa. As has been already hinted, the Bhakta accepts one particular form of God as his Chosen Ideal and begins to think and meditate on that alone. In the beginning he fails to bring before his mind's eye in meditation the complete form of his Chosen Ideal. But as he proceeds on with his practice of meditation, his mind gets more and more concentrated, and his mental image of God also becomes more and more vivid and steady. And subsequently, in a profounder state of meditation, the image becomes living, and it becomes possible for the devotee even to feel its Divine

touch and hold talks with it. At that stage, whether with eyes open, or closed, the least concentration makes the devotee feel the living presence of his Lord. Then again, from the belief that it is his Lord who has assumed all the different forms, the devout Sadhaka perceives the emanation of various other Divine forms from his own Chosen Ideal (Ishta). Shri Ramakrishna used to say, "To him who is blessed with the vision of one such living Divine Form, the vision of other forms of God come easily, of themselves."

But there is one point which needs elucidation here. Though these visions have their inception in the subjective mind of the devotee, yet, in the matured state of meditation, when the vistas of the thought-world are opened up to the mental gaze, they assume all the true colourings of objective reality as experienced in the waking state. And as these divine visions begin to come oftener and oftener and the consciousness of the reality of thought-world grows deeper and deeper, scales fall from the devotee's eyes and he begins to perceive that the so-called objective world with all its apparent concreteness is but an imagination of the mind. And again the visions in the state of deep medita-

tion appear with such an all-absorbing reality, that for the time being the objective world is completely obliterated from his consciousness. And this state has been described in the Shastras as Savikalpa Samadhi. In that state of consciousness, though the material world disappears altogether, yet there still remains for him the other world, the world of thought. Then the Bhakta feels the joys and sorrows of life with his God exactly as we feel in our relations with the objects and persons of the outside world. Only there is this difference that the web of all his emotions and desires is woven round his Beloved. And as various waves of thoughts still arise in his mind around the central theme, his Lord, the Shastras define the state as Savikalpa Samadhi or the superconscious state where mentation is not completely stopped but is held fast to one idea only.

Thus, by meditating on one object of the thought-world, the perceptions of the gross, external world disappear altogether, and when one idea gets hold of the mind strongly, all other ideas fall off from it. The Bhakta who has advanced so far is not far from the state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. It is needless to point out that he who has succeeded in get-

ting rid of the idea of the reality of the world has got his will sufficiently strengthened and his mind sharpened. And as a result, he soon comes to learn that if he can bring about a complete cessation of all temptations, his enjoyment of the Divine Bliss will be much intenser than hitherto, and so his mind eagerly runs towards the realisation of that state and through the grace of God and the Guru, he too soon crosses the thought-world and realises the Absolute Unity and thereby attains eternal bliss. Or it may be that his intense love itself for God takes him ultimately to that state, and then he feels like the Gopis of Vrindaban his identity with the Beloved.

Thus have been described in our Shastras the two processes of Jnana and Bhakti for reaching that state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

## **THE WORSHIPPER AND THE WORSHIPPED**

No worshipper worships matter. The Sat-chidânanda form of the Divine is the one object of worship of all devotees. The enjoyment of heaven and such other objects, only those who are full of desires pray for. "Having enjoyed the vast Svarga-world (heaven) they enter the mortal world, on the exhaustion of their merit. Thus, abiding by the injunctions of the Vedas, desiring desires, they constantly come and go" (*Gitâ* 9.21). This is for those who are devoted to rituals. The attainment of heaven etc. is not the goal of the true worshippers (*Upâsakas*). To them the question is about the Âtman (Self), which is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss—which is of the nature of intelligence. The worshippers, according to their Samskâras (inherent tendencies) look, upon this one Atman or Brahman as different objects of worship. Some see Him as the whole and themselves as parts of Him. Some again see Him as non-different from themselves. Some others again see Him as the Great Lord different from themselves. But even they do not think of themselves as inert

matter, but as spirit. Therefore we find that the question of inertness with respect to the worshipper never arises at all. The worshipper and the worshipped both are spirit, but only according to differences in the Samskaras of the worshipper their relation also differs. Once Shri Râma seeing Hanumân amongst the sages that had assembled before him, in order to satisfy all his devotees, asked him, "Well, how do you look upon me?" Hanumân, the best of the Jnânis, seeing some great purpose behind this question, replied, "When I think of myself as the body, then I am Thy servant ; when I think of myself as the Jivâtman (the individual soul), I am Thy part ; and when I think of myself as the Atman, I am Thyself—this is my conclusive opinion." Thus Hanuman happened to express the attitude of all the devotees. This is the essence of Vedânta. None has been disappointed in this. On the other hand each has been given his proper place. None need despair. In whatever stage they may be, all of them worship the one Lord and establish relationships with Him. "I am centred in the hearts of all ; memory and perception, as well as their loss come from Me. I am verily that which has to be known by all the Vedas, I indeed am the Author of Vedanta, and the

Knower of the Vedas am I" (Gita 15.15). That one intelligent principle, the Supreme Purusha, pervades everything, like the warp and woof. He is the one to be known in all the Vedas, the Creator of Vedanta, as well as the Knower of the Vedas. If this is known you have attained the goal of Vedanta. If this is not known, even if you should make a solution of the Vedas and take it, you will not know the Truth of Vedanta. I have understood it only in this sense. The Master's words, "I and my Mother, we two exist"—even this is to be understood in this way ; he does not talk of matter and spirit. He has talked only of spirit. "The worshipped as well as the worshipper, both are spirit. The attitude of a child towards its mother. The child knows none else but its mother—steadfast devotion." He is everything. "Or what avails thee to know all this diversity, O Arjuna ? (Know thou this, that) I exist, supporting this whole world by a portion of Myself" (Gita 10.42). He pervades the whole world with but a fourth part of His, and the rest three-fourths is beyond everything, ever free. Even the Vedas sing His glory thus : "All the creatures are but a fourth part of Him, the rest

three-fourths is in heaven and free" (Rig-Veda 10.90.3).

This much about Brahman. As regards the individual soul, if it has the body idea, then He is the Lord, and it is the servant. If it has the Jiva consciousness, then He is the whole, and it is the part; and when it gets the knowledge that it is the Atman, then there is no idea of differentiation. Then it identifies itself with the Paramâtman and says, "I am Thyself." That is the goal of the individual soul. This is Vedanta Knowledge accepted on all hands. He is everything—the knower, knowledge, and known; all these are but He. The Atman, the individual soul, and nature—all these are He. There is nothing else than He. He who says there is something else besides Him, is still under delusion. He talks in sleep—he does not realise what he is talking. Due to superimposition and contrary knowledge, Brahman in which there is not the least tinge of this duality appears as this manifold universe. It is only in this wise that scriptures say, "From this Atman, ether is produced, etc." (Taitt. Up. 2.1), but not in reality. From the absolute standpoint there is neither destruction nor creation, neither the bound

nor the worshipper, neither the aspirant nor the liberated" (*Mând. Kâr.* 2.32). This is the conclusion. Study, Japa, meditation, concentration, Samâdhi—these, no one says, are the highest goal. "Knowing Him alone they transcend death. There is no other way to freedom" (*Shvet. Up.* 3.8). This is the teaching of Vedanta. The Lord also says in the *Gita*, "All these worlds, O Arjuna, including the realm of Brahmâ, are subject to return; but after attaining Me, O son of Kunti, there is no rebirth" (*Gita* 8.16); "I am the Self, O Gudâkesha, existent in the hearts of all beings; I am the beginning, the middle, and also the end of all beings" (*Ibid.* 10.20); "The Goal, the Supporter, the Lord, the Witness, the Abode, the Refuge, the Friend, the Origin, the Dissolution, the Substratum, the Storehouse, the Seed immutable" (*Ibid.* 9.18). There is no need to say further that to the *Jiva* He is everything. As already said, it is not a thing for mere reasoning. It has to be realised. Having come to taste mangoes, it is better to taste them. What is the use of other vain talk? Those alone whom the Lord selects as Teachers, have to think of others—as to whether a parti-

cular faith would do good or harm to people. For us it is enough if we can but taste the mangoes.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Refers to one of Shri Ramakrishna's teachings: When you go to a mango orchard, it is better to get acquainted with the owner and with his permission to enjoy the fruits than waste your time and energy in counting the number of trees, the number of fruits and leaves on the trees and in vain discussions on mango culture. Similarly, being born in this world it is better to realise God and enjoy bliss than waste time in studying nature.

## BRAHMACHARYA

Truly does Shankara say that human birth is very rare indeed. The human form is the highest, and man the greatest being, because in that form alone lies his greatest and best chance to attain salvation—to attain knowledge. All other creatures, be they gods or angels, have to come down to this world and attain salvation through a human body. This is a rare privilege—this human life. And such a privilege we are foolishly abusing. Without appreciating the value of such a privilege we are bringing down untold miseries on ourselves by our evil actions. Can there be a greater irony of fate? Can there be a greater fool than one who, getting such a rare chance, busies himself with worldly things and aspires not after knowledge? Far from striving for knowledge, we are on the contrary getting more and more steeped in ignorance. What is the reason? Man, who was almost free from diseases, who used to do whatever he willed, who used to sing, "I have no fear of death etc.", and was thoroughly convinced of it—why is he today beset with a thousand fears, worried by distracting thoughts, and

sinking in the abysmal ocean of discontent ! What is the reason ? It is all due to lack of continence. Time was when a child could by his reply, pregnant with wisdom, strike dumb his enquirer, an intellectual giant ; when children like Nachiketâ and sages like Shukadeva were born. Why has such a society been brought to such a pass ? It is because we have lost that ancient fire, that ancient force in us, due to lack of continence. Without continence nothing great can be achieved.

What is Brahmacharya or continence ? It is the conservation of the sexual energy. In all spheres of life, whether spiritual or material, whether pertaining to this world or the other, this conservation of the sexual energy is absolutely necessary if success is to be attained. Without absolute continence, you can neither have perfect health, nor be able to do good to others, or attain realisation. The famous Dr. Nichols says, "The suspension of the use of the generative organ is attended with a notable increase of bodily and mental vigour and spiritual life." Therefore there is no hope of success in any sphere of life, whether material or spiritual, unless man maintains absolute continence. Shri Ramakrishna used to say, "When a man suc-

ceeds in the conservation of his sexual energy, his intellect reflects the image of Brahman, even as a glass gives a perfect image when its back is painted with mercury solution. The man who carries this image of Brahman in his heart is able to accomplish everything—he will succeed wonderfully in whatever action he engages himself." So without continence our life is useless.

The dictionary meaning of the word Brahmacharya is that Âshrama or stage of life which a man undertakes for the study of Brahman or the Vedas. The Vedas are generally studied in boyhood, so the first of the four Ashramas or stages of life is called the Brahmacharya Ashrama. The taking to this Ashrama is obligatory on all, specially on the Brâhmaṇas, the Kshatriyas, and the Vaishyas. Why is it obligatory? Because all the great and noble qualities of character are cultivated and easily acquired in this period of life. Nowadays it has become a fashion, so to say, in many countries to impart vocational education to children. No attention is paid to the improvement of their moral side, let alone the spiritual. In former days, however, this was not the custom with us. The primary attention was given to the building up of character; next came the imparting of

spiritual education; and last of all, some used to impart vocational training also. Then everyone knew that character and knowledge were things that were needed most, and that money and all other things would come of themselves to one who possessed these two. Character and knowledge are not subservient to money; the truth lies the other way about.

This Ashrama or stage of life is obligatory because of the fact that noble qualities are cultured in this period. Manu says, "In order to increase the force of his character, a Brahmacârî, living in the house of his Guru or preceptor and having perfect control over his passions, should duly practise these (viz serving the preceptor, repetition of mystic syllables, austerities, non-injury, forbearance, etc.)."

This stage of life is the very basis of all other stages of life. The other stages, viz the married life, the life of a recluse, and that of the Sannyâsin—all these stages of life wholly and fully depend on this period of Brahmacharya. Just as a building, though large and beautiful, is unstable if it is built on a shifting ground, even so no duties of any stage of life can be performed with any degree of success if this period of Brahmacharya has not been fully utilised—nay, one

is not even thought fit to enter any other stage of life.

The Lord speaks in the Bhâgavata: "When the Brahmachari (i.e., the boy undergoing Brahmacharya) shines like fire due to the faithful performance of great penances, when his sins and past evil tendencies have been burnt down by them and he has acquired love for Me (the Lord), then the preceptor will examine him (with respect to his knowledge); having passed the test the boy should offer honorarium to the Guru and take his purificatory bath with his permission, and then that good scion of the twice-born classes may take to a householder's life or to the life of a recluse or forthwith to the fourth stage of life, viz Sannyâsa, according to his own choice." So we see, this stage of life must be gone through by all.

Continence is such a great power, so noble, so necessary for all, that it should not be confined only to the first stage of life. It is wrong to think that it should be practised only in boyhood. Its function is not finished with the mere laying out of the foundation-stone of life ; it is not end with the climbing of the first step of the ladder of life. It functions throughout life. Without Brahmacharya it is impossible to build one's character

even as it is impossible to raise a building without mortar. Again, just as a particular part of a building totters where the strength of mortar is lost or weakened, so also that part of our life is exposed to dangers wherein the strength of Brahmacharya or continence is lacking. The qualities that are practised in the first stage of life are, all of them, equally necessary in all other stages of life. Even in the householder's life, continence is of great importance, not to speak of its necessity in the other three stages. Without Brahmacharya it is absolutely impossible to lead a householder's life according to the injunctions of the scriptures. Without self-control householders can never be true to their ideals. Shri Ramakrishna used to say to all, not excepting the householders, "Make the knowledge of oneness your own first and then do your work"; "Take firm hold of the post, i.e., God, and then go on whirling"; "Keep the greater part of your mind fixed on God and with the rest attend to your ordinary rounds of duty." With these and many other beautiful similes he used to teach householders how they should lead their lives. If one is to live as a householder up to these instructions, the first thing that is necessary is Brahmacharya. First of all, control over the senses is required.

The power of curbing, at will, the outward tendencies is to be acquired first. In one word, he must be perfectly self-controlled. It is for this reason that some speak of the householder's life as the greatest stage of life. It is indeed a very pure Ashrama. It is not for brutes but for the purest in heart, for the perfectly continent. For the human brutes the Lord has not prescribed any Ashrama. In no scripture can it be found that in the householder's life one can give free reins to one's passions. Just imagine for a moment how pure is that Ashrama where saints and monks, and even the Lord Himself, come to be born ! What great caution one must exercise here ! There can be no welfare without Brahmacharya, be he a student, a householder, a recluse in the forest, or an itinerant monk ; neither can national welfare come without it ; nor will the world know of peace.

It is not only in our country or our religion that Brahmacharya is so much emphasised or has such a great hold ; all the countries and all the religions of the world extol it. In ancient days absolute continence was not observed in other parts of the world ; it was the Vedic Rishis who first practised it in India. We have it in the Prashna Upanishad

that when six Rishis, viz Sukeśhâ Bhâradvâja and others—all devoted to Brahman—came to Rishi Pippalâda to acquire the highest knowledge, the latter asked them to observe Brahmacharya for one year more at the end of which he promised to initiate them into the highest knowledge. Again, in the Chhândogya Upanishad we have the dialogue between Indra, Virochana, and Brahmâ where Brahmâ taught Indra the knowledge of Brahman after making him undergo Brahmacharya for one hundred and one years.

From India this idea of Brahmacharya spread to Egypt among the Neo-Platonists and to Greece among the Pythagoreans, and more or less to many other countries of Europe, in later days. It was again from India that this idea spread to various countries of Asia. The Persians took it from India. Then the Buddhist preachers carried it far and wide. The Essenes took it from the Buddhists; and the Christians partly from the Neo-Platonists and partly from the Essenes. These Christians, in their turn, spread it in many other countries. It is seen that in all those countries where this idea of Brahmacharya has gone—there have arisen many great men. And no men have done greater service to their countries and to the world at

large than these men of continence. We may take St.Paul and Sir Isaac Newton as examples. So I say that those who want to do any real good to themselves or to their country, should practise Brahmacharya irrespective of the stage of life they might be in.

One should not think that Brahmacharya is to be observed only by the pious ; it is equally efficacious to those who do not care for religion, who do not believe in God or transmigration of the soul or in the Vedas. Because "the six treasures", as they are called, viz the control of the senses and the mind, forbearance, abstinence, faith, and mental concentration—all of which are included within Brahmacharya—are of the highest value to those who want their own good and that of their country, be they materialists or unbelievers in salvation or in the hereafter. Those among the materialists who are good and great have a very high regard for these "six treasures". Those who do not possess one or other of these six treasures, can never achieve anything really great. These are indeed six treasures. What do they care for in the world—those, who have control over their passions and their mind ? He is really poor, a beggar, who does not possess these six merits even though he be a mighty em-

peror. A moneyed or propertied man passes his days in fear or anxious thoughts, but the possessor of these six virtues is greater than monarchs, is even worshipped by the gods. He is filled with bliss and contentment to overflowing. Out of the fullness of these "six", earned by him, he can freely give to others. What can give more joy than this? In times of danger the rich flee for their lives leaving their friends and relatives to their fate, whereas those who are rich in these six superior merits pass their days without the least trace of fear—nay, they encourage and help others. Those who possess Brahmacharya are real lovers of their country. Blessed indeed are they.

Now it might be urged against these world-renouncing Brahmachâris or monks that they go against the commandments of the Lord as they do not marry and enter the householder's life. From the very beginning of creation the two paths of reaching God, viz through restrained enjoyment and complete renunciation, are in vogue. The Lord has willed it so. The Vedas say that whenever the spirit of renunciation comes, one should renounce and be a monk, no matter, whether it comes before or after marriage. "One should undertake that supreme journey (i.e., should

take to the monk's life) even from the first stage of life, viz that of a student, or from the householder's or from the forest-recluse's life ; one should undertake the supreme journey the very day one is seized with the spirit of renunciation." Sanaka, Sanānda, Sanātana, Sanatkumāra, Shuka, and others were all monks even from their very birth.

Some might say that if one renounces the world without marrying and begetting children, one is not absolved from the natural debts<sup>1</sup> and cannot get liberation. But in the Bhāgavata (11.5.41) Karabhājana, son of Rishabhadeva, says to Janaka, "The man who leaves off all works or duties and takes whole-heartedly to the worship of Mukunda (God) has no debt whatsoever to be discharged—be it to the gods, Rishis, relatives, manes, men, or other beings." In the Mahābhārata (167.26) the sage Nārada says to Shukadeva, "Without marrying, be the controller of your senses." Jesus Christ too says, "And there are eunuchs

<sup>1</sup> A Hindu is said to be born with three natural debts, viz the debt to the gods, to the Rishis, and to the manes. The first is to be discharged by sacrifices (Yajnas), the second by the study of the Vedas, and the third by begetting children. The scriptural injunction is that no sacrifice can be performed without the assistance of the wife. Hence unmarried persons cannot discharge the first and the third debt.

who have made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake" (Math. xix. 12).

Some apprehend that if one is to lead a celibate life, one will be prone to many diseases. It is wrong. Dr. Nichols says, "It is a medical—a physiological fact that the best blood in the body goes to form the elements of reproduction, in both sexes. In a pure and orderly life this matter is absorbed. It goes back into the circulation, ready to form the finest brain, nerve, and muscular tissue. This life of man, carried back and diffused through his system, makes him manly, strong, brave, heroic. If wasted, it leaves him effeminate, weak, and irresolute, intellectually and physically debilitated, and a prey to sexual irritation, disordered function, morbid sensation, disordered muscular movement, a wretched nervous system, epilepsy, insanity, and death." In the Jnâna-Sankalini Tantra, Shiva says, "Torturing the body is no austerity—Brahmacharya is the best austerity. A man of unbroken continence is no man but a god."

We too see it often, before our very eyes, how weak, chicken-hearted, and narrow-minded are those who are wicked and slaves to their passions, and how gloomy and miserable are their lives. And how forceful,

vigorous, courageous, and blissful again are the lives of those who are virtuous and have brought the senses under control.

Shri Ramakrishna used to say, "Whoever can give up the sex idea, can spurn at the world." He who has given up the sense-enjoyments, the outgoing tendencies of whose mind have been stopped—know for certain that God is not far away from such a heart, His shadow has already fallen there, He can no longer keep Himself away from such a devotee who cares not for anything else. Then he feels an ecstatic joy in every pore of his body. So intense is the joy that caught in it he loses all outward consciousness. He goes into trance and enjoys this ineffable joy in one continuous stream of consciousness. If that highest bliss is to be got and enjoyed without any break, the desire for these fleeting pleasures of sense-objects which ultimately lead man to terrible miseries should be mercilessly eschewed—not that kind of hypocritical renunciation which lasts for a day or two, but the wholesale uprooting of even the least vestige of such desires. If anyone succeeds in doing this, he will feel that what he was so long enjoying was but an infinitesimal part of that ocean of bliss filtering in through one or other of the sense-organs, and

that now through every cell of his body he is enjoying this infinite bliss—that this flesh-and-blood body has been changed and transfigured into something divine, to be a worthy receptacle for the divine Bliss. Can perversity go any further than foregoing this infinite Bliss for petty sense-enjoyments?

The only way to conquer lust is to look upon all women as our own mother, as images of the Divine Mother. Just as one is filled with devotion and prompted to worship when one sees an image of the Divine Mother, so should one be filled with devotion, be prompted to worship when one sees a woman. Never should we allow the idea of woman to rise in our minds. To know a woman as woman is to open the gateway to hell, while to know her as the Divine Mother is the way to salvation. We have to change the angle of vision. If we do so, we shall be free from the fear of temptation.

We have been born again and again, but what have we done to raise ourselves, to become divine? We have run again and again after these sense-enjoyments and suffered untold miseries. But never mind it is never too late to mend. A moment's sincere resignation of oneself and everything one possesses at the feet of the Lord is quite

sufficient to ensure one's Liberation. Yes, it must be sincere. This single act will revolutionise one's whole outlook on life. One will no longer see men and women but divinities. The hellish idea of sex and all sense of worldly enjoyments will appear stale or vanish altogether, and instead will be found a joy infinitely superior in blessedness. The world as it is, is full of misery; but it lies within the power of each man and woman to transform it into all-bliss. Every man is God, every woman is none else but the Divine Mother. Change thus your present outlook on life, and the Kingdom of Heaven is now and here. Brahmacharya is at once the means and the goal of life.

## **TRUTHFULNESS**

Nothing real can be achieved in the field of religion by mere talk. It is a thing to be practised—with all the intensity of life and soul. We can never hope to attain even a bit of religion, if we rest contented by simply making a verbal reproduction of the teachings of our scriptures like a talking machine, and make no further move. He alone has spirituality who has the internal realisation of it. To him alone who has the seed of religion comes its gradual unfoldment. Just as a seed of a banian is necessary to bring forth a mighty banian tree, so there must be the seed of spirituality in us first ; and then we have to rear up the tree—we should attempt to realise it—we must try to get our mind moulded by that one thought. Otherwise, none can become spiritual by simply stuffing the brain with a mass of stock phrases, and now and then making a parade of them before others, though one can thus pass for a great scholar. He can never be a spiritual man for all that. Shri Ramakrishna used to say that Pundits are like vultures which soar high up in the air but whose eyes are all

the time fixed on charnelpits in search of putrid carcasses—on lust and gold.

The first thing needed to be spiritual is truthfulness. Never forsake truth, even for all life. God is truth itself and is at the command of one who is devoted to truth. Spirituality is impossible to him who does not cherish truthfulness in thought, word, and deed ; without this, all attempt is in vain. So, first of all, try to be unflinchingly truthful with all heart and soul. Truth is ever victorious, in all times—past, present, and future.

Many do know theoretically much of what spirituality is ; but alas ! how few are there who put their knowledge into actual practice. The achievement will be *his* only who would follow up truth. We hear many say that it is impossible to be truthful in business. But I do not believe it. Where truth reigns there the Lord Himself abides. If the man of business carefully enshrines truth in his house, he will be looked upon as the greatest of all virtuous men and his business too is destined to thrive. Nâg Mahâshaya (a disciple of Shri Ramakrishna) was greatly devoted to truth. Once he went to buy something in the market and the shopkeeper charged four annas for that. As he was truthful, he took

the shopkeeper also at his words and did not bargain. A bystander seeing him pay four annas thought within himself, "What sort of a man is he, he did not even care to bargain!" But when he came to know that he was Nag Mahashaya, the saint, who believed that no one would dupe others, he took the shopkeeper to task for charging four annas for what was worth only two annas. The shopkeeper took this to heart, and so the next day when Nag Mahashaya came to buy something he charged only two annas for a thing which was worth five annas, at which Nag Mahashaya with folded hands addressed the shopkeeper thus : "Why do you behave like this with me ? This is worth more than two annas. Please take from me the proper price." The shopkeeper was deeply moved at this and fell at the feet of the saint. Therefore I say that you will never be a loser if you stick to truth. If you stick to truth, Divine grace is sure to flow to you through all channels—you will prosper not only in worldly affairs, but in spirituality as well.

If you have truthfulness, every other virtue is sure to come in its wake—even self-control. But we have lost this truthfulness, and that is why we have come to such a pass—groaning under the crushing weight of misery and

degradation. Now all our efforts must be directed first to retrieve it—not by mere empty speech, but by sincere action, pledging all our heart and soul to it. The principal element in spiritual practice is this sincerity of life—making the inner life tally with the outer, thought with speech. At present we are hypocrites, for we think one way and talk in a different strain. We are not sincere. This is delusion, this is ignorance. He who wants to be spiritual must give up talk and take to practice. God's grace descends upon such a person—he is sure to prosper here and hereafter.

Shri Krishna urges us in the *Gitâ* to perform work without attachment, to attain freedom even in this life. It is not a myth nor a figment of a morbid brain. We have actually seen such lives with our own eyes. We too have to attain this freedom, in this very life. We must attain it, even if we are to sacrifice everything for it. Otherwise all the tall talks of devotion (*Bhakti*), religion, etc. will ever remain confined to speech, without being realised in actual life. Unless we attain freedom, we cannot get pure devotion (*Bhakti*). In whatever station of life we may be, let us all say with all the force of our soul that we must become *Jivanmuktas*, the "living-

free". But then we will have to sacrifice our whole life. Many like to hear of Bhakti, indeed it is very pleasant to listen to it, but it demands the very life-blood, as it were, when one goes to practise it. Once a man wanted to have Prema (intense love) for God. Just then he saw a vendor passing by the street with a basket on his head, crying, "Ho, here is Prema. Who wants it? Who would buy it?" Hearing this, some boys cried out, "Oh, we, we will eat Prema"; some grown-up people also called out, "Oh, yes, we want Prema, we will buy it." At this, the vendor lowered the basket from his head and said, "Come, let me know how much Prema each of you will have. I sell Prema by weight. How much do you want, a pound, eh?" And with this he drew out a sharp knife and said, "Look here! cut your head off with this, and I shall give you Prema as much as your head weighs." If you want Prema you will have to give the price—your head! Verily, never has spirituality been attained by mummeries—by empty words! Sacrifice, terrible sacrifice of one's own life is the price for it. Have you not heard of Shri Râdhâ? She gave up everything—everything that one could hold dear of life; and so she got Him. We have also seen such lives ourselves. The sublime

lives of Shri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Nag Mahashaya, and others are ever shining brightly before our eyes. If you want spirituality follow such examples. To have wife, children, money, business, and all other felicities of life, and at the same time religion, is an impossibility. You have to give up everything, then alone can you have religion and spirituality.

## HINTS TO PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

The whole of Hindu Dharma is based on the Vedas. Therefore none of the different views, viz of the Purânas, Tantras, etc. are contrary to the Vedas. All these have the Vedas for their basis. For the easy comprehension of the Sâdhaka (aspirant), the Rishis have explained it variously and have also fixed different practical courses to be followed—that is all. The authors of the scriptures say that their views are based on the Vedas. If without studying the whole of the Vedas we should say, "This is not found in the Vedas", we shall be wrong—there is no doubt as to that. But merely going through the scriptures is useless. One has to undergo spiritual practices, when through the grace of the Guru, everything that is contained in the scriptures is revealed. Shri Ramakrishna used to say, "Merely saying 'Siddhi' (hemp) will not make one intoxicated, one has to get it, prepare it, and take it; then alone one gets intoxicated and dances about saying, 'Victory to Kâli ! Victory to Kâli !'"

The scriptures also say that to be given to vain argumentation is not good. Of course,

for the right understanding, some reasoning is necessary; but then, as one continues, the spiritual practices, gradually the doubts get themselves solved. Without spiritual practice, there is no end to doubts. Even as the questions arise from within, even so when the Truth is attained by the aspirant, all doubts disappear from within; and this is what is known as attaining Peace. He, on whom the Lord's grace has descended, knows. By mere reasoning none has attained to that state. This is the verdict of the scriptures. "This Âtman (Self) is not to be attained by reasoning, intelligence, or by great learning." Hundreds of such texts are proofs of this. And what are scriptures after all? As Shri Ramakrishna used to say, they are merely a list of things to be procured from the bazaar. The list helps to check whether all things have come. That much and nothing more. When the things are come, the list is thrown away. While sweeping the room, probably, one comes across this piece of paper again, and one says, "Let me see what it is." Seeing the list he says, "Oh, all that has been purchased, throw it off." Scriptures are also like that—they describe what results, when one gets knowledge and devotion. These things are written in the scriptures. We are to check

our experiences by comparing notes with the scriptures. If the results are not there, we have to try to attain the goal. If they are already there, we have simply to throw away the scriptures. That is why it is said, "When one gets knowledge of Brahman the scriptures become insignificant like a blade of grass." Shri Ramakrishna used to say that the Mother has shown him what there is in the Vedas, Purânas, and Tantras. That is why, though he was illiterate he could cripple the pride of learning in the learned. He would say, "If but a ray of knowledge from the Mother, who is learning itself, comes, then all knowledge derived from books pales away before it. There is no want of learning in him."

It is very difficult to conquer the senses, but then there is no other way out also. You may ask, which senses have to be conquered first? The Lord says in the Gitâ that all the senses have to be controlled. "Having controlled all of them" etc. (Gita 2.61). Manu also says that if even one of the senses is out of control then this knowledge leaks through this sense, even as water in an unbaked pot oozes out unconsciously. Therefore all the senses have to be controlled. But then though all the senses are strong, yet the palate and passion are the foremost; there is no doubt

about it. The Bhāgavata says that even though one might have controlled all the other senses, yet he, who has not been able to control the palate, cannot be said to be self-controlled. "A self-controlled man shall not be so called till he has controlled the palate. The palate being controlled every thing else is controlled" (Bhāgavata 11.8.21). Therefore the conquest of the palate is the first thing to be achieved. But then the Lord says another thing also. "Objects fall away from the abstinent man, leaving the longing behind. But his longing also ceases in him who sees the Supreme" (Gita 2.59). That is, if one practises austerities giving up food etc., the senses may become abstinent, but the longing is not destroyed. That vanishes only when the Lord is realised. As Shri Ramakrishna puts it in a homely fashion, "He who has tasted candy never likes molasses," i.e., if one gets love for the Lord, he does not love any more the world. One must get love for Him; and if one gets it, the sense-objects cease to attract him. Everything would look vain or contemptible. "The more you approach the East, the farther away will you be from the West; so also the more you approach God, the farther behind will the world be left." This takes place automatically; we

have not to try for it. The one aim should be to worship Him. We need not try to control the senses, they will be automatically controlled. Worshipping the Lord means giving up oneself completely to Him. He must be the one object of love, dearer than anything else. One has to get His grace, without that nothing is possible. Shri Ramakrishna used to say, "If one advances one step towards Him, He advances ten steps towards one." That is the only hope. Try to love Him and you will realise His grace.

No special attention with respect to eating etc. is necessary. It does not matter much if you satisfy some minor desires ; but then there must be discrimination along with it. You should be careful that you do not get attached to anything except the Lord. Holy company, good books, i.e., books dealing with God, and avoiding evil company are means to Bhakti. Try to proceed towards God, and there will be no danger. If you surrender yourself to Him, you will be free from anxiety and danger. "By His grace shalt thou attain supreme peace and the eternal abode" (Gita 18.62). Surrender yourself to Him and you will get infinite Bliss.

Why should you be anxious about wife and children ? Through His grace offer every-

thing to Him and be free from all anxiety. Wife, children, and everything are His. On you is the duty of bringing them up—that is all. Shri Ramakrishna used to say: The maid in a rich man's family calls the master's son as "My Hari"; but she knows full well that she only brings up the child and that her home is actually somewhere in a distant village. Renunciation is internal, to be without attachment knowing them to be the Lord's. External renunciation is not for the householder. It is for the Sannyâsins. To the householder the Lord says, "Out of mere compassion for them, abiding in their hearts, I destroy the darkness (in them) born of ignorance, by the luminous lamp of knowledge" (Gita 10.11); "For those whose mind is set on Me, verily, I become ere long, O Son of Prithâ, the saviour out of the ocean of mortal Samsâra" (Ibid. 12.7). "I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not" (Ibid. 18.66).

The Lord Himself takes the responsibility for all. The Lord takes the burden of the blessed. The Jnânis are afraid of birth. The devotees of the Lord only pray for devotion. They say, "O Keshava, in whatsoever form may I be born—as a worm, bird, deer, Râkshasa, Pishâcha, or man, may I, through Thy grace, have firm and well-established devo-

tion for Thee" (Prapanna-Gitâ). The Master once told me, "Those who hanker after Nirvâna are little-minded—they are always afraid. Just as in the game of dice, some are always eager to get their pieces home, and once they reach home they do not like to come out. These are ordinary players. But expert players never lose a chance of striking another's pieces, even if they have to get back their pieces from home for this purpose; and immediately after this, they again throw the proper number with the dice and get home again. They have full control over the dice. They throw getting whatever number they like. Therefore they are not afraid—they play without any fear." I asked him, "Does this really come to happen?" "Certainly," replied the Master, "through Mother's grace such a state does come. Mother likes him most who plays. She is not so much pleased with those who want Nirvana and thus want to bring the play to a close. Mother likes play. That is why the devotees do not want Nirvana. They say, 'It is not good to become sugar, O mind ; I like to taste sugar.'"

Great hankering for God-realisation is absolutely necessary, but then it is not good to get perturbed or disheartened at the fact that the mind has not become calm. One should

feel oneself blessed if one can but patiently wait making Him the goal. He is making you think of Him ; is this not by itself a great kindness on His part ? Now, to make the mind calm or otherwise is in His hands. It is quite enough that He makes you think of Him. Pray that He may ever keep you engaged in His worship. Why should you pray for getting the mind calmed down ? Go on meditating on Him like the farmer in Shri Ramakrishna's parable, who never gives up farming because the season has been unfavourable. Think yourself blessed if you can meditate on Him. Offer happiness and misery, peace and restlessness at His feet, and be content in whatever condition He places you. Learn to pray that He makes you worship Him, and peace would come of itself. You have not to pray for peace but for keeping you engaged in worship. The Lord is not like material things which you can get by paying for them. There is no end to spiritual practices that you can say that He is attained by doing so and so. You have to wait patiently for His grace, surrendering yourself to Him. His grace will come of itself. By breathing practices or by any other method nobody realises Him. He who has realised Him has been able to do so through His

grace. If He allows you to remain waiting at *His* doors, that is grace enough. What else is meant by spiritual practice? It is nothing but to take the Lord's name, being consistent in thought, word, and deed. Be not insincere. That is enough. If any more spiritual practice is necessary, He will have it practised by you.

## **THE WAY TO FREEDOM**

Man is born with a restless, discontented nature. Unlike the lower animals he cannot rest satisfied with any limited amount of power, knowledge, or wealth, however vast that may be in its own way. Every man is aspiring to raise himself higher than where he is. Human life is indeed a constant struggle against whatever tries to impede its onward flow. Here perhaps some may object by saying that a lazy man hates such struggles, and therefore is an exception to that rule. But in reality he is much more active than a so-called active man; for an extremely active man can at most build a cottage in a few hours, whereas the lazy fellow builds big castles in the air in a second. Shri Krishna says, "No one can live for a moment without action." Every man is forced by nature to act. In the case of the lazy man his desires to enjoy better things does not cease. Passions and appetites have more control over him than in the case of an active man, but he is so much overpowered by laziness that he rests content by enjoying them in mere

imagination. Desire to enjoy better, to know more, to be more and more free to attain one's desired objects—in short to be a master rather than a slave is the one great struggle of mankind. It is the one goal towards which every man is moving. His success in this depends upon the intensity of his desire and effort to attain it. The spirit in man always wants to assert itself and does not like to be put down. This shows that by nature we are true masters. Although we are bound by environments, still we cannot help thinking that we are really masters. A slave in a court is a master in his own house, and perhaps the enjoyments which the slave has at his house far surpass the royal luxuries. So, however badly circumstanced, these environments cannot completely obliterate our natural independence. We are sure to assert it sooner or later. Environments merely hide our nature from our view and force us to believe otherwise. The clouds cannot affect the sun, nor is the sun going to be eternally hidden by them. Cuckoos hatched by crows, think themselves to be crows for some time, but soon their nature asserts itself, and they leave the company of the crows. No circumstances, however unfavourable, are able to put down nature. The same is the case

with man. He asserts his nature which is freedom.

From our childhood we hate restraint. Though we love liberty, yet it is a fact that we have no liberty. We may love pleasure, but there is no pleasure for us without hard labour and pain. We may hate pain, but still it intrudes on us without our consent. Such being the case, it will not be very safe to be callous to all such intrusions, for in that case we shall become a plaything in the hands of misery. We must struggle hard to put down this misery and have pleasure which we count so much. The first thing necessary is to be proof against all sorts of temptations. We must build up our character and that can be done only by sacrificing our liberty and forcing ourselves to go through a regular course of good discipline for a certain number of years. When that discipline becomes natural to us, then we shall know that our character is formed. So long as we have no decided preference for anything, we are at the mercy of the senses. So long as we have no ideal to follow, we will have to heed to the calls of our lower nature; a characterless man is a slave to all worldly enjoyments. Whatever appears to him to be pleasant at

first sight, he blindly follows, without caring for the after-effects. Passions and appetites have been compared to the insatiable fire ; the more fuel you put into it, the more lustily will it burn, and the more fuel it will want ; no one can appease the hunger of fire. Therefore, those who think that desires can be conquered through gratification labour under a great mistake. There is no food on earth, eating which we shall hunger no more, nor any drink taking which we shall thirst no more. This insatiable nature of our desires is illustrated in the life of King Yayāti. His life clearly shows that if we follow the dictates of the senses we shall never be able to satisfy them. The king had to admit after a lifelong attempt to satisfy his desires by gratification, as follows : "Desires are in no way allayed by enjoyment, but rather increase more and more even as fire grows by being fed with clarified butter." It is not only fruitless to serve a master who is hard to please, but it is also very dangerous to serve him, for he will never allow you to take a moment's rest. No rest can such a slave have, nor can he ever hope to be a master. Unfortunately all human beings are such slaves. There are very few, if any, here in this world, who do not

act at the beck and call of his passions and appetites.

Now that we have known the danger, it is our duty to avoid it. He is doubly a fool, who once suffering from a burn again thrusts his finger into the flame. We all want to be masters but the fact is, we foolishly become slaves to our senses. We forget our ideal being drunk deep with the wine of contact-born pleasures of the senses which result in misery. Thus we always forget our goal, and love to wallow in the mire of false pleasure.

Generally, the word, "master" is not understood in its higher sense, that is, in the sense in which we have explained. We are apt to regard a rich man as a master and his retainers as servants ; but in reality the servants are the true masters, for they can help themselves, whereas the so-called master is a slave to them, for he cannot do without them. What is true of a rich man is also true of a king or an emperor. But then what about great conquerors, like Napoleon or Alexander the Great, who were all self-reliant and never trusted themselves wholly to the care of their men. They were never fond of luxuries but were always active and bold. Should we not regard such men as masters ? In answer we should say that to the degree they were self-

*helping, to that extent they were masters no doubt ; but so long as man wants anything he cannot properly be called a master.* They were in want, because they had not enough and wanted more. He alone should be properly called a master who has got enough and to spare, who wants nothing on this earth, who is always full like the ocean which does not suffer in any way because the sun takes away tons of water daily from it. Really the more a man wants, the more is he a beggar. How can such a man be called a master ? Can a beggar be a master ? The more a man wants this thing and that thing, the more is he a slave to the senses ; and all your heroes and conquerors are such people. Ambition is their ruling passion, never satisfied with anything, always restless. They are the worshippers of their lower selves, and do not scruple to deluge the world with blood to satisfy their senses. They are solely ruled by their senses. How can such people be entitled to assume the noble title of master ?

But you may ask, "Are we in any way different from our senses ? When we taste a mango, do we not really enjoy it ? Are we in any way different from such enjoyments ? Can we dissociate the idea of self from seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and tasting ?" To

answer this, we shall have simply to refer to some incidents of our daily experience. When a man relishes a sweet mango, he no doubt identifies himself with the enjoyment. His whole mind is concentrated in tasting the mango, and therefore he relishes it ; but if his mind is directed to something else—suppose he is engrossed in speculating on an important transaction—the man may eat the very same mango at the time, but he will not care much to know whether that is sweet or sour. He will simply mechanically eat it. Similarly you fail to perceive a picture in front of your eyes, if your mind is otherwise employed. These considerations show that we can easily dissociate our mind from our organs as well as our perceptions. We are altogether different entities from our bodies and our perceptions. Now these sensations and perceptions are either pleasure-giving or pain-giving, and we court or hate them accordingly ; thus desires, appetites, and passions are created in us. So we see that these desires etc. have their birth in the body, and are therefore altogether different from ourselves. Therefore when a man becomes a slave to them, he cannot be said to be a real master, inasmuch as he serves something else than himself.

Now if we analyse our mind, we find it to be made up of thoughts, and these thoughts again are made up of perceptions, sensations, experiences, desires, etc., all of which have their birth in our senses. So mind also is something separate from us. The nature of mind is restlessness. The nature of pure Self is calmness, for in it there cannot be any desire ; and desire being the cause of all our activities, there can be no activity in our Self. It is always one and the same, it never changes. When it identifies itself with the mind, then alone it comes to think wrongly that it is active, wants this and that thing, and thus, forgetting its masterly nature, becomes a slave. Shankara says, "What makes a man worthless and of no consequence ? Begging. What makes him great and of great consequence ? Non-desire and contentment." A discontented man, even if he be a very wealthy man—a prince or a king or an emperor—is really a slave, for he has not been able to conquer his desire ; but a contented man—whether he owns a cottage or not, whether he possesses a piece of rag to cover himself or not, whether he daily procures some wretched food to keep his body and soul together or not, whether the world holds him in es-

teem or not—reigns supreme over all circumstances. He is not mastered by desires, but desires are slaves to him, and they cannot move him. Thousands of rivers may flow into the ocean, but all of them lose themselves in it, and the ocean is not in the least affected by them. Similarly thousands of desires may flow in that great individual, but they lose themselves in him. He is always the self-same being, no change comes over him. Such a man is a real master.

Everyone of us is such a master ; only through mistake we identify ourselves with the mind, and thus think ourselves other than what we are. To dispel this mistake should be the aim of each and everyone of us. We must struggle hard and long, and in the end we are sure to realise our true nature. "This highest Self cannot be realised by a weak and cowardly man, neither by him who wants in vigilance or right meditation. But by him alone who is strong and vigilant and meditates and thinks rightly can that highest world of Brahman be attained." So to reach that height of a real master, the Vedas advise us to be strong, vigilant, and meditative. We must have strength sufficient to resist all evil temptations. Temptations sometimes disguise themselves and assume the form of

duties. We must be vigilant enough not to be deluded by those false appearances. Constant meditation on the real nature of our Self makes us unmindful to the demands of our senses till at last they demand no more, and we get fixed in the conviction of our masterly nature. Hence we should always be meditative.

Kings and emperors rule this world but for a few days. Such is not the case with true Masters. The world is always ruled by such great souls. Instead of being kings and emperors, these people prefer the life of abject poverty, and from that apparently low condition they rule over monarchs and conquerors. Their lives are not limited, their powers are eternal, their friends comprise the whole world, their bliss is perennial, and their energies are always employed for the amelioration of their brother-men. The ancient sages of India used to live in cottages built in the midst of forests. Buddha walked all over India with his begging bowl in hand preaching to everyone his noble doctrine, intended to save people from birth, disease, old age, and death. Jesus Christ had not a stone to lay his head upon. He was like the birds of the air, neither sowing nor reaping. He did not care to know where he was to get his

next meal from. Shri Chaitanya had the sky for his roof and the earth for his bed. And so was the case with Râmânuja, Shri Madhva, Guru Nânak, and others who are the real rulers of the world. The paths which they have laid down are followed to this day by humanity. Those paths alone can lead us to the realisation of our real nature.

## **THE GOAL AND THE WAY**

If we think calmly for a while, we find that all the scriptures speak in the same strain and of the same goal. True, they teach the same truth ; yet this appeals to people when put in different ways. We shall discuss some scriptural teachings about the goal and the means to it. It is a trite saying : As a man sows, so does he reap. Scriptures too say that as a man thinks, so does he become. Success depends upon exertion. There is an invariable connection of cause and effect between right exertion and success. Whatever a man earnestly tries to do must meet with success.

Religion is hardly a matter of lecturing, learning, or teaching. It is a thing to be experienced. There may be many ways of spiritual practice according to temperamental differences of aspirants. This is why there have been so many sects in the domain of religion. If we analyse all the sects of our country, we can divide them under four heads, viz Jnâni, Karmi, Bhakta, and Yogi. Those who avoid sense-objects and hankerings after them and remain content in the Self alone, take to the path of knowledge

(Jnâna). Those who, being in the midst of worldly objects and activities, find themselves very limited in resources and take refuge in the Almighty God are known as Bhaktas (devotees). Those who work in the right spirit are Karmis (selfless workers). There is another class of men who try to uproot the seeds of desires by looking into the very depths of their mind through concentration. They are called Yogis.

In Bengal, Bhakti is more prevalent. We do not care to understand the rest. We think ourselves very weak—this is a great defect with us. The more we think so, the weaker we become. Such ideas are as harmful as pride—both are impediments to real progress and ought to be shunned. This is what Shri Ramakrishna used to say. Once the Holy Bible was read out to him. In it from the very beginning, there was reference to the doctrine of sin. After hearing a little and finding that it talked of nothing but sin he refused to listen any more. He used to say, "Just as in the case of snake-bite, if the patient could be made to believe that there was no poison at all, he would be all right ; similarly, if one constantly thinks, 'I have taken the name of the Lord, I am sinless,' one becomes pure." The more we give up

such ideas as "I am sinful", "I am weak", the better for us. In man dwells the Almighty God. We are part of God, we are His children. How can we be weak? Our strength springs from Him—we can never be weak. So, the greatest sin is to think oneself weak and sinful. To think like that is to be an atheist. If you have to believe anything, believe that you are His children, His part, the heirs to His infinite strength and bliss. Believe that your body and mind are the sacred temple wherein is always enshrined God, the Pure, Illumined, and Free. Believe that He is in every man and woman, tree and creeper, and sentient and insentient being. There is none else except Him in the entire universe. Try to see Him in the blue of the sky, in the dancing waves of the sea, in the face of a woman, in the simplicity of a child, in the horrors of the cremation ground, and in the steadfastness of a Yogi. Such an attempt is a sort of spiritual practice in itself.

This idea is very clearly expressed in the Gitâ. In the sixth chapter Arjuna had said in effect: "Senses run after lust and gold. Men follow the sense-objects due to their attraction. Moreover, they have to remain in the worldly affairs till the last moment of

their life. So, where is the way out of it?" The Lord replied, "Whatever being there is, endowed with grandeur, beauty, or strength—know that to have sprung only from a spark of My splendour (Ch. X)." The beauty you find in the sun, the moon, beasts, birds, and in the enchanting female figure is but a part of His splendour. His lustre is manifested in all these. Men cannot realise their true nature and so get attached to them. The Lord says again, "But what avails thee this detailed knowledge, O Arjuna? I stand pervading the whole universe with a fragment of Myself." Do not these beautiful words of the Lord tell us that we should not think of ourselves and others as sinners? Does He not teach us thereby that we should take man to be divine—the veritable image of God? Learn it yourselves and teach your children and neighbours the same. We speak one thing and do another. Unless there is agreement between your words and thoughts nothing will avail you, even if you should take the name of the Lord or attend religious gatherings all night. Nowadays there are so many religious societies, but people lose all interest in them after a few days.

What is the reason for this? The reason is, our words are not consistent with our

thoughts. The first step in religion is to be sincere to the core. Shri Ramakrishna used to say that this is the foremost requisite in spiritual life. Where are such sincere souls? How many such souls are there in a thousand? In every work we do, our words and thoughts are at variance. A small thing we cannot do, yet we rush in where angels fear to tread.

We cannot give a little water to a thirsty man and yet we run to organise religious meetings, preach divine love, and save the country by removing all its needs! Here is an instance to show how insincere we are. The Chandi says, "O Goddess, all the sciences are Thy expressions, and all the women, Thy various images." We have all read the Chandi. But how many of us are there who look upon women as images of the Goddess? There are not a few who read the Chandi, but who at the same time do not hesitate to ill-treat their wives for a trifling matter. Instead of looking on them as images of the Goddess, they think that women are meant only for bearing children and cooking food.

In the Vedic age, there were many women seers. In the Brihadâranyaka Upanishad we find that in the council of Janaka, a Sannyâsini named Gârgi put very profound questions

on religion to the sage Yâjnavalkya. Lilâ, Khanâ, and other learned women of old are well known to all of us.

Many of you have heard of the wonderful life of Ahalyâ Bâi, who lived not long ago. She herself did all the administrative work of her State. In all the big places of pilgrimage are seen her acts of glory even today. The roads built by her for the convenience of the pilgrims even in the distant mountains bear witness to it. We treat as slaves those in whom lies dormant the wonderful strength of the Mother of the universe ! Only at the time of worship do we simply utter the words that all women are but the images of the Divine Mother !

Again, our scriptures say, and we too proclaim, that all men are the images of the Lord. But what do we do in practice ? We do not scruple to despise sweepers and other low-caste people even to a greater degree than cattle. Those who respect cattle more than men—what brains can they have ? If we believe in the scriptures, it is our duty not to think ourselves weak under any circumstances, and to worship man as God. We must think that we are parts of God, or His children. That this body of ours, as also of all others, is but His temple. As all

the waters of the Ganges are from the Himalayas, so does all strength spring from the Almighty God. If we have this firm faith, we shall gradually improve. Wherever in the world, there has been culture of knowledge, there men have come to understand that in man lies infinite power. It often happens that when we ask people to do any good or philanthropic work, the usual reply is : "Where is money ? How can we work without money ?" How foolish ! Say that we have lost our manhood. If we are *men*, money cannot but come. Money does not make a man. It is man that makes money. Shake off all weakness and try to be *men* from today. If you think yourselves weak, you can never develop your latent divinity—rather it will get atrophied. Believe that you possess infinite power ; manifest it by good works and good thoughts.

Therefore, our first practice should be not to think ourselves weak, and to save ourselves in all possible ways from all sorts of weakness. The second practice should be to make our words consistent with our thoughts. In the Gita too, we find that these two practices are advocated as the essential requisites for all aspirants before they take to any particular course of training.

Arjuna fell into grief, sorrow, delusion, and fear simultaneously, when he faced on the battle-field his own kith and kin, and persons like Bhishma, Drona, and others. But then he concealed his fear, delusion, etc., and said to Shri Krishna, "It is better to live on alms than to kill one's own relations for the trifle of a kingdom."

At first, he came to fight just like a Kshatriya for the cause of righteousness. But when he found his kinsmen and great warriors on the battle-field, he yielded to delusion and fear. He then forgot his own duty and began to talk irrelevantly in the name of religion. But how could he hide his thoughts from the Lord who resides in the hearts of all?

The Lord said, "Do not yield to this unmanliness, O Arjuna, for it does not become thee. Shake off such a base faintness of heart and stand up, O scorcher of thine enemies!" Weakness breeds all sorts of meanness. It is the source of all sins. What is the use of mere bread-winning education? True education consists in acquiring strength of body and mind.

I have already told you that there are four paths to religion. If we analyse them, we find that they lead men to the same goal.

The Vedas, Purânas, Tantras, etc. teach us that the goal is one, but that there are various ways. The famous *Mahimnah-Stotra* says, "O Lord ! although there are so many philosophies such as the Vedas, Sâṅkhya, Yoga, Shaiva, Vaishnava, and so on, they are but different ways to Thee. Thou art the destination of all that travel according to their tastes by paths straight or crooked." Shri Ramakrishna used to say, "As there are various ways to Kalighat, so each of the philosophies is but a way to the Lord." In the scriptures we find different doctrines and practices inculcated to suit people of varied inclinations. Therefore, different philosophies, although they appear as contradictory to one another, are in fact, not so, for the goal is the same.

Spiritual practice means the struggle to realise those states and experiences which the great sages had when they saw the vision of Truth or to become like them. The Gita depicts the characteristics of perfected souls : "When a man puts away all the desires of his mind, O Arjuna, and when his self finds comfort in Self—then is he called a man of steady wisdom." As we breathe freely, so do these men forsake lust and gold without any effort. Their body and senses are so consti-

tuted as not to lead them astray. We need not dwell much upon the characteristics of men of realisation or about their realisations, since we are far from the goal. The crying need with us is to know all the various means to God-realisation and to select one from among them and build our life accordingly.

Formerly scriptural truths were kept away from the masses. This no doubt preserved the priestly supremacy intact ; but the national life degraded for want of learning. The priests, however, justified their conduct by saying that truths when imparted to unfit persons were often misunderstood and resulted in grave consequences ; as for instance, Vedânta, which when misunderstood often makes atheists of men, thereby making them more attached to things of the world. In reply, it might be said : If you cannot find out the right aspirants, give everybody the opportunity of reading and thinking over the truths ; then each man will choose his own path. Nowadays all the scriptures are being printed, so it is useless to hide them.

Now let us see, following what main disciplines the four kinds of aspirants, viz the Jnani, the Bhakta, the Yogi, and the Karmi, reach ultimately the same goal. The Jnani discriminates between the Real and the un-

real, and renouncing the desire for unreal objects seeks the Real in his own self. That he declares as the true Self. His aim is to destroy the little self of desires which is limited by body and mind and to become the higher Self. The Jnani's practice consists in discrimination through the process of "not this", "not this", and meditation on the true nature of the Self. The Jnani says : Give up at once what you find to be unreal after due discrimination. You will see on examination that body, mind, etc. are not real, and that if you can get rid of your thoughts about and attachment for, them, you will realise the eternal Self and remain in It. Once you get established in the Self you find that the Absolute and the relative are inseparably connected as the sun and its rays. Therefore, the Jnani says : All that we see in the universe is the manifestation of the Self and the Self alone. And I am that Self. To bear it in mind always is the main effort of the Jnani.

The Yogi says that man becomes subject to a good many Samskâras (latent tendencies) by indentifying himself with sense-objects from birth to birth. This is the reason why he suffers so much and finds it very difficult to get free from them. The Yogi suggests a

means : Sit still. Do not indulge in any thought, forgetting your self. Allow the mind to think, and you begin to watch calmly its various workings as a witness. Then concentrate your mind on an object. This concentration will burn the seeds of Samskaras and reveal the Truth. Right concentration will bring in Self-realisation. Therefore, we see that the chief effort of the Yogi is to think himself as the witness under all circumstances and to concentrate the mind fully on a single object.

The Bhakta says : Completely surrender yourself at the feet of the Lord and establish a particular relationship with Him. The relationship may be that of father, mother, friend, master, husband, etc. According to your liking, you may choose one of them. Give all unto Him—your body, mind, wife, children, and everything that you have. A question may arise : How to form a relationship with one whom we do not see ? Well, you love somebody very dearly. Take him to be your God for the time being. Then gradually you may be able to have that relationship with the Lord.

A lady once put this question to Shri Ramakrishna : "I cannot steady my mind. The thought of my nephew always haunts

*it.*" He replied, "Well, take your nephew to be the Lord and serve him with this consciousness." By following the advice for some time the lady attained to the super-conscious state. You cannot make God your own and love Him, so long as you cannot establish some relationship with Him. Râmprasâd used to sing : "He is an object of love ; without having love, through abstract thought alone, we cannot realise Him. When love for Him arises, He draws us like a magnet attracting iron filings." If you completely surrender yourself to Him, become His absolutely, your little self full of selfishness will vanish and the true Self will appear at once.

The Karmi says : Work for the sake of the Lord and give all fruits to Him. Never work for selfish purposes. Selfishness is death. Always work but never be attached to the fruits thereof. Do work as worship and never work for name, fame, and money. Make work a service to the Lord. He is playing in various ways in the world. Think yourself blessed if you can do a little service to Him. It is unnecessary to say that if you work like this your selfishness will gradually be destroyed and the real Self will be manifested.

The above four kinds of spiritual practices are meant for these four classes of men. But the aim is the same—to kill the lower self. Think deeply and you will find there is hardly any difference among them. In fact, there is none. Kill the little self, and you will be free. Shri Ramakrishna used to say, "When shall I be free? When 'I' ceases to be. The soul in bondage is Jiva, when free it is Shiva." When the "I" of ignorance departs, man becomes God and attains freedom. Shri Ramakrishna used to say, "As water is called variously, so is God."

These are the main things about spiritual practice. They are very essential in building life and in reaching the goal.

First make your thoughts consistent with your words. Then take up any path you like. Try seriously to build your life from this very day. The Lord Himself will give you whatever else is required. "Relinquishing all duties, take refuge in Me alone. Do not grieve, I will deliver thee from all sins." If you sincerely take refuge in Him, there can be no sin or weakness any more. He alone can save us from all evil. Let this be our prayer to God—that from today we all can believe that by the power of His Name we are free for ever from all weaknesses and sins.

## **GURU**

In the present age we find religious agitation more or less everywhere. Even the highly educated English-knowing people, leaving aside their atheism, are taking part in some religious movement or other. Among the religious inquirers we find men of different natures. Some say, "Follow the general custom, be initiated by the hereditary Guru, tell your beads, and perform religious austerities, and you are sure to realise God. One should not forsake one's hereditary Guru, it is a great sin to do so. Therefore whatever be the character of this Guru, be initiated by him and perform religious rites to the best of your capacities." They themselves adopt the same method. Sometimes they read or hear the Mahâbhârata or the Purânas and some of them go through the Tantras also.

There are some again who go through some of the Shâstras (scriptures) by themselves. Nowadays translations of the Gitâ, the Puranas, the Upanishads, the Vedânta-Sutras, the Yoga philosophy, etc. have been published. With the help of these books, or

sometimes with the assistance of a Pundit, they try their best to get at the real essence of the Shastras. From these Shastras they select some method of spiritual practice which suits their temperament, and practice accordingly. Either they do not acknowledge the utility of having a Guru, or if they acknowledge it, they do not think it to be absolutely necessary. Some people do not give any serious thought to it. Among them again there are some who say, "If you cannot get a Siddha Guru (i.e., one who has realised God), it matters little whether you have one or not. When we find such a one, we will accept him as our Guru." Some among these associate with Sâdhus (holy men), and some do not do anything at all. "God is omniscient, He will surely hear if you pray to Him. He will give you whatever you want, so what is the necessity of an external Guru?"—this is the opinion of a few others.

Again, those who hold the opposite view say, "Nothing can be attained without a Guru, but any Guru will not do, a Siddha Guru is necessary." Those who are initiated by their hereditary Guru and are performing religious rites according to the prevailing custom—if they are asked about their progress, they invariably reply that they are mere-

*If following their Guru's instructions and do not know whether they are progressing or not. "Have you attained peace of mind?" "No, not even that," is the reply. Moreover, it is seen that their love for God is not increasing day by day. The attraction they have for lust and gold—not even an iota of that have they for God.*

From these conflicting opinions the question arises whether a Guru is necessary in any way for one's salvation or for leading a religious life. If so, then is he an absolute necessity, i.e., is it impossible to attain salvation without a Guru? Then again, what qualifications should a Guru possess? For a proper solution of these problems we must depend on reason, the Shastras, and the sayings of sages.

First let us see what reason says in the matter. A little thought will help us to understand that though prayer and other spiritual practices depend on individual efforts, yet the world has never seen a person who just after being born straightway went to some lonely place and sat in meditation and was absorbed in it. Many people understand this, for there is no such fool as will deny that by reading the Shastras and other books and by hearing various religious discourses from pious persons, he has come to

form some idea about God and religion. Even those who doubt the absolute necessity of a Guru probably do not deny that by associating with a Sadhu, by passing long hours with a sage, and by his example, one does advance in spirituality; or from seeing the Sadhu's earnest devotion in prayer, from his benevolent actions, and other qualities, a desire to possess those qualities does arise in us. Perhaps they are afraid of having to pay respect to a single individual and to follow his teachings for ever; for how can such a thing be compatible with reason?

In reply to this, it may be said that whatever branch of knowledge a man may learn, there arises the necessity of a teacher in some form or other. Not that one cannot learn anything without any external help, but it takes a longer time, and one has to undergo a good deal of suffering and trouble. One has to learn first what one's forefathers learnt and then, if possible, acquire something more —this is the rule. This acquisition of knowledge from others does not mean getting by rote what others have to say; but it means an intelligent study through self-effort. To learn something from others means to make it one's own. This is also true in the case of a spiritual Guru. If we can bind oursel-

ves with some strong spiritual bond to some really great man, the truths that he has realised are easily acquired in our own lives also.

Moreover, a really advanced Guru possesses a rare power of understanding the spiritual nature of his disciple and so is able to point out to him the easiest way for him to salvation and God-realisation. If there is the possibility of constant association, then the Guru helps him up to the last moment by instructing him as to how to avoid all sorts of obstacles that may arise during Sadhana and by teaching him higher and higher methods of spiritual practice according to his progress. Everyone of those who have been fortunate enough to get a real Guru is of opinion that there is a great difference between the initiation by a true Guru and that by the ordinary hereditary Guru. A true Guru imparts a special spiritual power with the Mantra (mystic symbol) during the initiation and gives the Mantra also according to the spiritual nature of the disciple, so that by comparatively less effort and Sadhana the aspirant attains the goal.

True Gurus do some additional service to their disciples. They, in fact, take the responsibility of their disciples. If perchance

any disciple goes astray, they employ various means, both worldly and spiritual, to get him back to the right path. In case any disciple after acquiring a perfect knowledge of all the teachings of his Guru, aspires after higher realisation, then he is at liberty to take to another more advanced Guru; but unless the disciple is really advanced, it is better to stick to a single Guru for life; otherwise he cannot be firmly established in his ideal. Regarding obedience to Guru's orders, it may be said that a true Guru never commands unjustly; but it is necessary to observe one for a long time before accepting him as a real Guru. One should not accept anyone and everyone as a real Guru on the spur of the moment. Those who are desirous of having a real Guru should live with him for some time and examine his character till they are convinced that he is a true Sadhu.

Some may say, "If I have the capacity to judge a real Guru then I myself am a Guru." But this is false logic. Do you not really distinguish good from bad at every step? If you are destitute of that judgment, why do you call some good and some bad? If you have not the power of judging a man's character—to find out whether he has conquered lust, anger, etc., whether he has great devo-

tion and wisdom, and is uncovetous—then you should rather sit in a lonely corner and with folded hands pray to God, "O God! give me the power of judging good and evil." Some get cheated because they take a man to be perfect without examining him thoroughly. When you have once taken a man as your Guru why should you hesitate to carry out his orders in every respect? Can he ever lead you to evil? It is clear now that they alone, who have not in the least derived any benefit by being initiated by the hereditary Guru and who are really eager to realise God are at liberty to accept a real Guru. If it so happens that after being initiated by a real Guru, it becomes impracticable to have his association either due to his having given up the physical body or due to his stay in a far off place, then, if one thinks it necessary, one may take help from any other great man, without giving up the method of Sadhana one has already learned from one's Guru. It is said that the Avadhuta accepted twenty-four secondary Gurus.

Now let us see what the Shastras say about this. It is impossible to discuss the subject of Guru fully in the light of the Shastras in this short article. Here I shall quote only a few passages from the Shrutis which are the foun-

tain-head of all authority. Thus say the Shrutis:

"In order to know Him the disciple with fuel (for Yajna) in his hand should go to a Guru who is well versed in the Vedas and has supreme devotion to God."

"He who has an Āchārya (Guru) gains wisdom."

"He who teaches and he who learns about the Supreme Soul, both of them should possess marvellous qualifications."

"If one is taught by an unenlightened Guru, even by a good deal of long meditation one cannot understand Him."

"He who has deep devotion to the Supreme Soul and has an equal amount of devotion to his Guru, within the heart of that great man bloom forth the truths taught by the Shastras."

There are many such passages in the Shruti-s. Everybody knows that the Tantras are full of such texts. In them there are nice discussions about the qualifications of a true Guru and about false Gurus. The entire purport of them all is that realisation can be attained only by performing Sadhana under the guidance of a true Guru. But in some places in the scriptures, statements like, "Whatever be your hereditary Guru, be initiated by him," are also found, but these are

no doubt later interpolations by the Gurus after they had become degenerate and selfish. Religion is not a social affair, and so there is not in it the least idea of social duty or custom. The hereditary Guru, i.e., he who was my father's Guru may have the claim to be honoured socially, and if I am able I may give him sufficient money too; that much and no further. But when that sincere restlessness for God-realisation arises in the heart, where shall I go then except to that place where my yearning will be satisfied? To whom shall I go in search of water leaving one who can quench my thirst? I must have the freedom to choose my own Guru.

The great sages, when asked, say, "By learning the methods of Sadhana from a Guru who has realised God, being advised by him at every step, being enlightened at every step by the light of truths realised by him, we have come to this state. If you really want to realise God, you also have to follow the same method." All great men hold the opinion that a true Guru only can interpret the difference between the Real and the unreal. It is seen that wherever there has been a marvellous expansion of any religion, there a really great man as helper was at the back of it. People in ordinary parlance say, "This

man's power is due to the blessings of his Guru." We have read in the Shastras that there is a God; men say that there is a God; but a real Guru says, "I have seen God." He shows his disciple also the way to realise God and leads him slowly towards the goal. At the very sight of a real Guru a devotional feeling towards him naturally arises. From his very appearance one can find that he has tasted some supreme bliss and that he is getting absorbed in it more and more day by day. As soon as one goes near him all the sorrows and miseries of the world pass away and no trace of the worldly life is left in the mind. When by his holy touch the sleeping power of Brahman within is awakened, the disciple sees the ocean of bliss on all sides.

What cannot a disciple do for such a Guru? Is it not natural for a disciple to be grateful to him? "Know thy Guru as Brahman," say the Shastras. Can such a sentiment arise with respect to a professional Guru? But it is natural with respect to one who has realised God. Those who bring forth such childish arguments as that it is blasphemy to regard a man as God, and are therefore not inclined to regard the Guru as Brahman Himself, and who due to ignorant dualistic views imagine an infinite gulf between the Creator and the

created—we advise such people to read and understand carefully the Advaita Vedânta and to practise Sadhana along with it.

No question can arise as to whether this Guru is a Brâhmaṇa or a Shudra, a Hindu, a Mohammedan or a Christian, a Sannyâsin or a householder. He who knows Brahman is a Guru, and Brahmana etc. are mere titles.

I have seen many Gurus in this world and have taken advice also from them but to no purpose, because they bore no testimony of having known Brahman. Their worldly attachment had not gone. They had neither discrimination nor renunciation. To take advice from an ordinary Guru is as fruitless as to ask a blind man about the direction of a place. They cannot impart spiritual power with their advice. I have heard and also believe that a Guru who has known Brahman imparts with the Mantra such a strength to the mind of his disciple, that he acquires a new life altogether. From that very day begins a new faith, a fresh life for him. I have heard a good many instructions from ordinary Gurus, but none has left any impression on the heart. Once I heard a story on this subject from Shri Ramakrishna:

A king had become world-weary. He heard that Parikshit gained divine wisdom by

hearing the Bhâgavata for seven days. So he sent for a neighbouring Pundit and began to hear the Bhâgavata from him. He heard it daily for two months, but he gained no wisdom. Then he asked the Pundit why Parikshit who had heard the Bhagavata for only seven days could get divine wisdom, whereas he gained nothing though he had been hearing it for two months. He told the Pundit that if he failed to give any satisfactory explanation by the next day, he would not get any remuneration whatever. The Pundit returned home exceedingly sorrowful, dreading the terrible displeasure of the king, but he could not find out any reply even after much thinking. He was sorely troubled and was lost in thought. Now he had an intelligent and much devoted daughter. Seeing her father so dejected, she worried him to tell her the cause of his grief ; at last moved by filial affection he was obliged to give out to her the cause of his sorrow. The girl laughed and said, "O father, do not mind it. I will give a proper reply to the king." The next day the Pundit appeared before the king's court accompanied by his daughter and said to the king, "My daughter will answer your question." The girl said to the king, "If you want to have the answer you must hear what

I say." The king consented, and the Pundit's daughter ordered the sentries to bind her as well as the king to two pillars. Being ordered by the king, they did so. Then the girl said, "O king, release me out of this bondage." "What nonsense do you talk! I myself am in bondage, how can I release you?" said the king. The girl then laughed and said, "O king, this is the reply to your question. King Parikshit was an earnest seeker after salvation and the preacher was no other than Shukadeva who had renounced everything, was much devoted to Brahman, and was an enlightened soul. Hearing the Bhagavata from him King Parikshit gained divine wisdom. But my father who is much attached to the world is reading the Bhagavata to you in order to get money. How can you get that wisdom hearing it from him?" From this illustrative story it is clear that there is no chance of our being free from bondage without being guided by a true Guru.

We hear a few other remarks on this subject. Some people say, "Whatever be the disciple, if he can get a real Guru, he is sure to get salvation." Others again say, "Whosoever be the Guru, the disciple attains salvation if he possesses faith, love, and devotion." We do not deny both these views; but

such cases are very rare in this world. As a general rule both the Guru and the disciple should be fit people. We see great differences among the disciples of the same great man. It is all due to the nature of the disciples themselves. If the disciple possesses devotion, humility, and perseverance, then he easily assimilates the teachings of the Guru. From what we find in our Shastras about the relation between the Guru and the disciple, it is quite clear that the duties that are laid down for the disciple so discipline his mind and body that he turns out to be a real man.

It may be said that we hardly find that sort of devotion to the Guru nowadays and that many seem to be determined to do away with it. If this devotion to Guru becomes extinct from our land, then all good qualities, such as ardour, faith, devotion, etc., will surely vanish and licence will reign in society in the name of freedom. You may examine a person before you accept him as your Guru ; but having accepted him once, you must prepare your mind in such a manner that you can sacrifice your life even at his word. Many persons may think that if we depend on the Guru to such an extent, our freedom of mind would be lost, and gradually we shall be-

come like a jelly fish. There is no ground for such an apprehension. A real Guru never checks the freedom of mind but rather so guides and teaches his disciple that he finally gains mental freedom, is able to stand upon his own legs, and shaking off the bondages of the senses, mind, family, and society, is able to soar high like a free bird. How much obligation do men feel for a small sum of money or a little physical help from others! Why then do you think it unjust to show your gratefulness to him from whom you have come to know the essence of life or the means of getting the greatest thing, and from whom you have received constant help to acquire it? There is no nation so grateful as the Hindus. The day the Hindus forget their devotion to the Guru, they will no more be true Hindus. Remember the story about the devotion of Upamanyu to his Guru in the Mahabharata. That unflinching devotion, that boundless faith in the Guru's words, once raised India to its highest pinnacle of glory. If India rises again she will do so only through this devotion to the Guru, through the recognition of the Guru as God Himself—not the God of our imagination, but as God manifest. If we are ready to sacrifice our lives for him, then only we shall be

able to perform great actions. Not only shall we be able to secure our own salvation, but we shall also be able to do something for our motherland and for our race.

## **FOUR PATHS OF YOGA**

Our main problem is to be free. It is evident then that until we realise ourselves as the Absolute, we cannot attain to deliverance. Yet there are various ways of attaining to this realisation. These methods have the generic name of Yoga (to join, to join ourselves to our reality). These Yogas, though divided into various groups, can principally be classed into four; and as each is only a method leading indirectly to the realisation of the Absolute, they are suited to different temperaments. Now it must be remembered that it is not that the assumed man becomes the real man or Absolute. There is no becoming with the Absolute. It is ever free, ever perfect; but the ignorance that has covered its nature for a time is to be removed. Therefore the whole scope of all systems of Yoga (and each religion represents one) is to clear up this ignorance and allow the Âtman to manifest Its own nature. The chief helps in this liberation are Abhyâsa and Vairâgya. Vairâgya is non-attachment to life, because it is the will to enjoy that brings all this bondage in its train; and

Abhyasa is constant practice of any one of the Yogas.

*Karma-Yoga* :—This Karma-Yoga is purifying the mind by means of work. Now if any work is done, good or bad, it must produce as a result a good or bad effect ; no power can stay it, once the cause is present. Therefore good action producing good Karma, and bad action bad Karma, the soul will go on in eternal bondage without ever hoping for deliverance. Now Karma belongs only to the body or the mind, never to the Atman; only it can cast a veil before the Atman. The veil cast by bad Karma is ignorance. Good Karma has the power to strengthen the moral powers and thus creates non-attachment; it destroys the tendency towards bad Karma and thereby purifies the mind. But if the work is done with the intention of enjoyment, it then produces only that very enjoyment, does not purify the mind or Chitta. Therefore all work should be done without any desire to enjoy the fruits thereof. All fear and all desire to enjoy here or hereafter must be banished for ever by the Karma-Yogi. Moreover, this Karma without desire for return will destroy the selfishness which is the root of all bondage. The watchword of the Karma-Yogi is “Not I, but Thou”, and no amount

of self-sacrifice is too much for him. But he does this without any desire to go to heaven, or gain name or fame or any other benefit in this world. Although the explanation and rationale of this unselfish work is only in Jnâna-Yoga, yet the natural divinity of man makes him love all sacrifice, simply for the good of others, without any ulterior motive, whatever his creed or opinion. Again, with many, the bondage of wealth is very great; and Karma-Yoga is absolutely necessary for them for breaking the crystallisation that has gathered round his love of money.

Next is *Bhakti-Yoga*. Bhakti or worship or love in some form or other is the easiest, pleasantest, and the most natural way for man. The natural state of this universe is attraction, and that is surely followed by an ultimate disunion. Even so, love is the natural impetus of union in the human heart; and though itself a great cause of misery, properly directed towards the proper object, it brings deliverance. The object of Bhakti is God. Love cannot be without a subject and an object. The object of love again must be at first a being who can reciprocate our love. Therefore the God of love must be in some sense a human God. He must be a God of love. Apart from the question whether such

a God exists or not, it is a fact that to those who have love in their heart this Absolute appears as a God of love, as personal.

The lower forms of worship, which embody the idea of God as a judge or punisher or someone to be obeyed through fear, do not deserve to be called love, although they are forms of worship gradually expanding into higher forms. We pass on to the consideration of love itself. We will illustrate love by a triangle, of which the first angle at the base is fearlessness. So long as there is fear, it is not love. Love banishes all fear. A mother with her baby will face a tiger to save her child. The second angle is that love never asks, never begs. The third or the apex is that love loves for the sake of love itself. Even the idea of object vanishes. Love is the only form in which love is loved. This is the highest abstraction and the same as the Absolute.

Next is *Râja-Yoga*. This Yoga fits in with every one of these Yogas. It fits enquirers of all classes with or without any belief, and it is the real instrument of religious enquiry. As each science has its particular method of investigation, so is this Râja-Yoga the method of religion. This science also is variously applied according to various constitutions. The

chief parts are the Prâṇâyâma, concentration, and meditation. For those who believe in God, a symbolical name, such as Om or other sacred words, received from a Guru, will be very helpful. Om is the greatest, meaning the Absolute. Meditating on the meaning of these holy names while repeating them is the chief practice.

Next is *Jnana-Yoga*. This is divided into three parts. First: hearing—that the Atman is the only reality, everything else is Mâyâ (relativity). Second : reasoning upon this philosophy from all points of view. Third: giving up all further argumentation and realising the truth. This realisation consists in : (1) being certain that Brahman alone is real and everything else is unreal; (2) giving up all desire for enjoyment; (3) controlling the mind; (4) intense desire to be free. Meditating on this reality always and reminding the soul of its real nature are the only ways in this Yoga. It is the highest, but most difficult. Many persons get an intellectual grasp of it, but very few realise it.

## KARMA-YOGA

Shri Krishna teaches in the Bhâgavata, Karma-Yoga for the desirous. What kind of Karma is it? We want to know how those who are desirous can perform work without attachment. Of course their actions are prompted by desires, but that does not by itself make their actions tainted. If those actions are prohibited by the scriptures, if they are sinful, then alone are they blame-worthy. Those whose minds are attached to enjoyment, cannot but perform actions prompted by desires, for the satisfaction of those desires. If they are asked to perform work without any motive, they cannot understand that teaching at all. That is why the scriptures have prescribed for them actions with desires. The Gitâ does not teach merely work without attachment, but also work for the fulfilment of desires. "Prajâpati having in the beginning created mankind together with Yajna, said, 'By this shall ye multiply; this shall be the milch cow of your desires' " (Gita 3.10). Scriptures hold out different ideals to different people according to their capacity. Each selects, according to his own fitness, one

from out of these teachings, adheres to it with Shraddhâ, and attains prosperity. That is why the Lord says, "Devoted each to his own duty, man attains the highest perfection" (Gita 18.45). One has to perform the duty for which one is fit and thus increase the Sattva in him—that is the teaching of the scriptures. He who has strong desires must be given some scope for enjoyment. You cannot by mere instruction forcibly turn his mind away from enjoyment. But then there should be enjoyment with discrimination, for there can never be satisfaction of desires by enjoyment. It goes on ever increasing like fire into which ghee is poured. That is why enjoyment should be regulated by discrimination. Then only will there be any chance of one's realising the situation, as was the case with king Yayâti. Work without attachment should be the aim, the goal, but it cannot be realised by mere talk. In fact, there can be nothing like work without attachment, for without illumination one cannot be truly free from attachment. Work without attachment before realisation is work done for realising the Lord. Work done for realising the Lord is "no work".

The desire for devotion is no desire, i.e., no cause of bondage. Thus if work is done

for His sake, it is said to be done without attachment. Otherwise, strictly speaking, the Jnânis (enlightened ones) alone can perform work without attachment. For due to knowledge all their desires are burnt down. Except the Jnanis none else has the power to do work without attachment. But then work done with the desire of attaining knowledge, can still be called work without attachment. It is difficult to understand the true nature of work. That is why the Lord says, "The nature of work is impenetrable" (Gita 4.17); "Even sages are bewildered as to what are action and inaction" (Ibid. 4.16).

Shri Ramakrishna also says, "Mother, take this your action and inaction, and give me pure devotion. Take this your sin and virtue and give me pure devotion." Such an easy path for realising God, suitable to every one, no one has taught till now. Just as a cow takes all kinds of food when it is mixed up with a little oilcake, so also the Lord accepts all worship when it is tinged with devotion. "Somehow or other if we can but offer everything to Him, if we can but think that He is our dearest, our beloved, if we can but do everything, think every thought, for His sake, then we are blessed." Like Shri Ramakrishna, the Lord Shri Krishna, the preacher of

the Gita also again and again reiterates in his teachings: "Whatever thou doest, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou offerest in sacrifice, whatever thou givest away, whatever austerity thou practisest, O son of Kunti, do that as an offering unto Me. Thus shalt thou be freed from the bondages of actions, bearing good and evil results. With the heart steadfast in the Yoga of renunciation, and liberated, thou shalt come unto Me" (Gita 9.27-28). That we are not able to put into practice such an easy teaching as this is undoubtedly a matter for great regret. He whose mind is attached to sense-objects, will, by performing actions prescribed by the scriptures and by the performance of his duty, gradually have his mind purified and finally attain desirelessness. That is why even the performance of action from desires is called Karma-Yoga. That is also the reason why the injunctions of the scriptures are held in such high esteem. "He who, setting aside the ordinances of the Shâstras, acts under the impulse of desires, attains neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the goal Supreme." These are the words of the Lord. If we can only offer everything to Him, then we need not be any more anxious nor have fear nor ransack the scriptures so much.

No doubt this is not easily attained; yet we need not lose heart, for the Lord says, "Gradually, gaining perfection through many births, he reaches then the highest goal" (Gita 6.45). If it be not attained in this life, it will be attained in the next life; but we should see that the ideal is not lost sight of. We must go on practising, and we are sure to reach the goal one day. We have to become His completely. We have to surrender ourselves to Him, completely giving up all our ego and pride, without in the least depending on ourselves or anybody else. This is the essence of the teachings of the Gita. He is very kind; and if we can only depend on Him, He gets everything done for us. He has so promised in the Gita, "My devotee never comes to any grief" (Gita 9.31); "The doer of good never comes to any grief" (Ibid. 6.40). This is another fundamental teaching of the Gita.

Man is only an instrument, the Lord alone is the agent. Blessed is he whom the Lord makes His instrument and gets His things done by him. Everyone has to do work in this world. No one can escape from it. But if anyone works for the fulfilment of his selfish end, his work instead of working out his liberation, brings him down. The intelli-

gent, doing work for Him, escape from the binding effect of work. "He is the doer and not I"—this realisation breaks all bondages. This in fact is the truth. The idea, "I am the doer," is only an illusion ; for it is difficult to find out this "I". If we investigate into this "I", we shall find that the real "I" merges in Him. The ego-consciousness with respect to the body, mind, and intellect is a delusion due to mere ignorance. They do not subsist to the last. None of these stands the test of discriminative investigation. Finally everything vanishes, and That alone is left from which everything proceeds, in which everything subsists, and to which everything returns at the end. That is Brahman—the Sachchidânanda (Existence-Knowledge-Bliss), the witness of this ego-consciousness, the creator, protector, and destroyer, and at the same time the infinite, unattached, and indifferent. Resting in Him this world-machine is driven by His power. The sportive Lord looks at His own play and enjoys. To whomsoever He reveals this, he alone understands. The rest even seeing do not understand—thinking themselves separate from Him, they get deluded. This is His Maya. This Maya vanishes if one works for the Lord surrendering oneself to Him.

## **WORK A MEANS TO KNOWLEDGE**

On the one hand, we find that man has to work. He cannot be without work at any time. So long as he lives he has to do some work or other. It is impossible for him to be, without doing anything. On the other hand the scriptures say, "So long as man cannot renounce work completely, knowledge and liberation are a far cry for him." Now these two views are apparently quite antagonistic and it is very hard indeed to harmonise them. That is why in the Gitâ the Lord teaches Karma-Yoga, thereby harmonising these two apparently contradictory views. He too says that so long as one does not reach that stage where one is free from all work, one will not attain knowledge or peace. There is no doubt about it. But then one does not reach that state by simply sitting idle without doing any work. That will make hypocrites of us. When we reach that state, we shall feel that we are without work, that we are different from the body and the senses, which alone are engaged in work. Work can be done in such a way that we can gradually reach this state of worklessness. The secret

of Karma-Yoga is to learn to be non-attached even when one is engaged in intense activity.

The body and the mind will be engaged in work, yet one will be at peace, non-attached —this is what is known as the state of worklessness. To be idle physically while building castles in the air is not to be without work. That is why Shri Krishna says in the Gita, "He who sees inaction in action and action in inaction, is intelligent among men, is a Yogi, and doer of all action." The Yogi, while engaged in work, sees inactivity in it as he is non-attached to it, and he knows also that to be idle is far from being inactive. Such a Yogi alone can do all work efficiently.

We have therefore to engage our mind and body in work but at the same time keep ourselves non-attached and be at peace. This state wherein work and knowledge are thus harmonised will be attained by all of us. Though it is natural with the liberated, the aspirant has to attain it with great effort and practice. He has to attain it gradually through intense work yielding happiness and misery.

How to harmonise work and knowledge is the main theme of the first few chapters of the Gita. In that age people, not being able to understand the true spirit of the

scriptures, confounded work and knowledge. They thought the two were contradictory and mutually exclusive. Even now we find this idea prevalent. Some people think that if we want to be religious, we have to go to the forest; that any service rendered to our fellow-beings will not help us spiritually. Again, there are others who think that to be in the world with wife and children is the very acme of life. They are not able to understand that kind of knowledge for which one has to leave the world and all work. They think such a knowledge to be something unnatural, a state of inertness. The first section has forgotten that the scriptures say that unless our mind and intellect are purified by work we cannot attain knowledge. The other section who think themselves learned without going through the scriptures do not accept that scriptures teach that the goal of man is to attain knowledge.

The scriptures enjoin on man their study first. For then only will he be religiously-minded. Religion is based on work. At first man has to engage himself in various kinds of work with the idea of attaining spirituality. When on account of this work he experiences happiness and misery in turn, the idea that this world is unreal slowly

dawns on him. Then he tries to work without any selfish motive for duty's sake—he learns to do work for work's sake. By so doing his mind gradually gets purified till at last he does all work without any selfish motive whatsoever. This is real renunciation. When once man gets this spirit of renunciation, the desire to know the Truth arises in him and he realises It easily. He attains to the knowledge of oneness. This idea of oneness pervades the whole world. Once man gets the knowledge of oneness, he is never again overpowered by ignorance, even as when we have once known the nature of the mirage, we never again mistake it for water. Even after attaining the knowledge of oneness, a person may again return to the world of diversity, to work as a teacher of mankind or to fulfil some other divine mission. It is within the control of the Jnâni to work or not to work. But then though he comes back to the world of diversity, he no longer takes it as real like ordinary people.

If we forget that work is the only means to attain knowledge, we shall get into difficulties. All kinds of work, from the mending of shoes to the reading of scriptures, help man to proceed towards knowledge, if he does it disinterestedly. Thousands of Sannyâsins

and householders are struggling to attain knowledge. But unfortunately a great majority of them, instead of giving up selfish interest in work, are trying from the very beginning to give up work itself as far as possible, with the idea that it is all Mâyâ. The result is, all works for selfish ends like eating, drinking, etc. remain while works of charity, service to the helpless, love of country, etc., which do good to others, are first given up. For such works are cumbersome and difficult. As a result, the whole country is saturated with selfishness and is going down to destruction. If all these people should follow the teachings of the Gita and work disinterestedly for the good of others and for the good of the country, for example, if they serve the poor and educate the illiterate, then this disinterested service would help them towards God-realisation, and the country too will be benefited.

It is only when the mind is purified by Karma-Yoga that it is able to attain knowledge. Shri Ramakrishna used to say, "God is beyond the reach of the impure mind but is cognised by the pure mind." So the only means to knowledge is to do work without any selfish motive. If we can do work in this way, then work of any kind whatsoever, is

sure to bring about realisation in time. Work by itself is not despicable. The defect is with us, for we do work prompted by selfishness and thus get caught in it like the caterpillar in its cocoon. That is why Shri Krishna says, "Thy right is to work only, but never to the fruits thereof. Be thou not the producer of the fruits of thy actions. Neither let thy attachment be towards inaction." Let the body, intellect, and the senses be engaged in intense work, but you must be established in the Self, which is beyond all work. Be a man, ever conscious of your true nature, and thus be at peace. Do not yield to any weakness and take things which are transient as real and thereby suffer misery. Go on working unselfishly. This is true Sannyâsa as also Karma-Yoga: "Know that to be devoted to action which is called renunciation." True renunciation and selfless work both lead to the same goal: "Both renunciation and performance of action lead to Freedom." But all the same, the idea that knowledge is superior to action is not removed from Arjuna's mind, for he finds that when knowledge dawns, there is no work left. So he says, "If, O Janârdana, knowledge is superior to action, why then, O Keshava, dost Thou engage me in this terrible action?"

Arjuna here forgets that the knowledge of which Shri Krishna talks as the goal of mankind is beyond all limiting conditions, while the knowledge of which he talks is conditioned. So Shri Krishna again explains to him and praises this path of work thus: "O Arjuna, do not think that this path of work is something new. It is also, like knowledge and devotion, one of the ancient paths to realisation. Many great souls like Janaka and others have attained realisation by this path." That path of work is about to become extinct. No one works for the good of the many giving up his selfish motives. Even on religion this selfishness is encroaching, not to talk of, on other fields of human activity. Those who are mean-minded, weak, slaves to their senses, and dependent cannot attain to realisation by this path. He who is ever anxious about his own self, power, or even about his own salvation can never be a true Kama-Yogi. He alone can be a true Karma-Yogi who is spirited and broad-minded; who without caring for any personal loss forgets himself in alleviating the misery of the afflicted, in the service of his country or some great soul.

## **LOVE OF GOD**

We accept God not because we really want Him, but because we have need of Him for selfish purposes. Love is something absolutely unselfish, that which has no thought beyond the glorification and adoration of the object upon which our affections are bestowed. It is a quality which bows down and worships and asks nothing in return. Merely to love is the sole request that true love has to ask.

It is said of a Hindu saint that when she was married, she said to her husband the king that she was already married. "To whom?" asked the king. "To God", was the reply. She went among the poor and the needy and taught the doctrine of extreme love for God. One of her prayers is significant, showing the manner in which her heart was moved : "I ask not for wealth; I ask not for position; I ask not for salvation; place me in a hundred hells, if it be Thy wish, but let me continue to regard Thee as my Love." The early language abounds in beautiful prayers of this woman. When her end came, she entered into Samâdhi on the banks of a river. She

composed a beautiful song, in which she stated that she was going to meet her Beloved.

Men are capable of philosophical analysis of religion. A woman is devotional by nature and loves God from the heart and soul and not from the mind. The songs of Solomon are one of the most beautiful parts of the Bible. The language in them is much of that affectionate kind which is found in the prayers of the Hindu woman saint. And yet I have heard that Christians are going to have these incomparable songs removed. I have heard an explanation of the songs, in which it is said that Solomon loved a young girl and desired her to return his royal affection. The girl, however, loved a young man and did not want to have anything to do with Solomon. This explanation is excellent to some people, because they cannot understand such wondrous love for God as is embodied in the songs. Love for God in India is different from love for God elsewhere, because when you get into a country where the thermometer reads forty degrees below zero, the temperament of the people changes. The aspirations of the people in the climate where the books of the Bible are said to have been written, were different from the aspirations of the cold-

blooded Western nations, who are more apt to worship the almighty dollar with the warmth expressed in the songs than to worship God. Love for God seems to be based upon a basis of, "What can I get out of it?" In their prayers they ask for all kinds of selfish things.

Christians are always wanting God to give them something. They appear as beggars before the throne of the Almighty. A story is told of a beggar who applied to an emperor for alms. While he was waiting, it was time for the emperor to offer up prayers. The emperor prayed, "O God, give me more wealth; give me more power; give me a greater empire." The beggar started to leave. The emperor turned and asked him, "Why are you going?" "I do not beg of beggars", was the reply.

Some people find it difficult to understand the frenzy of religious fervour which moved the heart of Mahomet. He would grovel in the dust and writhe in agony. Holy men who have experienced these extreme emotions have been called epileptic. The absence of the thought of self is the essential characteristic of the love for God. Religion nowadays has become a mere hobby and fashion. People go to church like a flock of sheep. They do

not embrace God because they need Him. Most persons are unconscious atheists who self-complacently think that they are devout believers.

## **WHAT IS TRUE SELF-SURRENDER ?**

After Girish Chandra Ghosh had visited the Master several times, he one day surrendered himself absolutely to him and said, "What shall I do henceforth?" The Master replied, "Go on with what you have been doing till now. Try to keep to both sides of life—God and the world. We shall see what is to be done, when one side crumbles down. But try to recollect and contemplate on the Lord every morning and evening."

On hearing this, Girish said to himself, "Such is the nature of my work that I have no fixed hours even for bath, food, and sleep. I am sure I shall forget to contemplate on the Lord every morning and evening. And that will be very bad, for it is a great sin to transgress the commands of the Guru. How then can I accept this injunction? It is a sin not to act up to one's promise even to an ordinary man. How much more sinful it would be not to be true to one whom I have accepted as my guide to the Eternal!" But though Girish thought this way, he found it hard to speak out. For, he was conscious that the Master had not asked him to do anything very diffi-

cult. Yet he could not forget the extremely restless condition of his mind and knew that even short spiritual practices were impossible for him. Besides, he had always found his nature against routine work and hard and fast rules. He therefore remained silent.

At this, the Master looked at Girish and having divined his mind, said, "Well, if you cannot do this, remember the Lord once before meals and sleep."

Girish still remained silent. He was not sure that he was capable of even this. There were no fixed times for his meals. And sometimes, it had so happened that, in the pressure of worldly affairs, he had gone through his meals quite unconsciously. Who could say that there would not be any more occasion of such forgetfulness? Girish remained silent filled with fear and despair.

The Master looked at Girish and said smilingly, "You will plead that you cannot do even this? Very well, then give me the power of attorney."<sup>1</sup> The Master was now in an exalted semi-conscious state.

<sup>1</sup> The power of attorney is a formal instrument by which one person authorises another to do some act or acts for him. By this expression Shri Ramakrishna indicated that henceforth he (Shri R.) would do on behalf of Girish all that was necessary for the latter's spiritual improvement.

This indeed was after the heart of Girish. He felt a great peace within, and the thought of the great compassion inspired him with a great love for the Master. He said to himself that it was very well he did not bind himself down to any rules, for now it was enough if he firmly believed that the Master would redeem him by his Divine powers. The giving of this spiritual "power of attorney" then meant only this much to Girish, that he would not have to strive or practise Sâdhanâ himself to be rid of his evil tendencies, and that the Master himself would accomplish this by his own power. He then did not realise that, though intolerant of the bondage of discipline and unwilling to submit to it, he had yet freely embraced a hundredfold stronger bondage of love. He did not and could not realise that henceforth he had only to be patient and passive under all circumstances, whether fame came or ill fame, good or evil, joy or sorrow. Now he was conscious only of the infinite kindness of Shri Ramakrishna, and was immensely proud that the Master had granted him protection. "Whatever others may think of me," he thought within himself, "however they may hate me, he, Shri Ramakrishna, is always, under all circumstances, mine. What do I care for others?" He was

not aware that such pride, rare and auspicious to men, was considered a *Sadhana* in the *Bhakti-shâstras*.<sup>1</sup> He constantly indulged in the happy thought that Shri Ramakrishna had taken all his responsibilities ; and this made him continually meditate on Shri Ramakrishna, which gradually brought about fundamental changes in his thoughts and actions. It is true Girish was not conscious of this change, but he was quite happy at the thought that Shri Ramakrishna loved him and was his very own.

The Master always taught that no one's mental outlook should ever be disturbed, and he always acted up to this principle in his relation with his disciples. Having therefore created the attitude of self-surrender in Girish, the Master henceforth trained him accordingly. One day, hearing Girish say, "I shall do this" in a certain trifling connection, the Master exclaimed, "How is this? Why do you say, 'I shall do this'? Suppose you fail to do it? You should say, 'God willing, I shall do this.' " Girish understood. "Quite right," he said to himself ; "since I have fully surrendered my responsibilities to the Lord and He also has accepted them, I can

<sup>1</sup> Nârada-Bhakti-Sutra.

do a certain thing only if He thinks it should be done by me and is to my benefit and allows me to do it. How can I hope to do it with my own power?" Thenceforward, Girish tried to give up speaking and thinking in this positive, egotistic way.

And thus days and years passed. In course of time Shri Ramakrishna passed away. Girish lost his wife and a son. But through all these, his mind held to the thought that these sufferings were because the Master had thought them best for him; the Master had taken his burden, and it was for the Master to decide and do what was to his best interests —Girish had no right to oppose or chafe at them. And thus he came to feel, with the passing of days, the true significance of self-surrender. Has he even now fully fathomed its meaning?<sup>1</sup> When Girish is questioned, he says, "Much yet remains to be known. Did I then perceive that self-surrender meant so much? Now I find that ordinary Sadhana has an end some time; but this business of self-surrender has no end; one has to continually scrutinise and see whether even the minutest thought and action are actuated by

<sup>1</sup> This was written during the lifetime of Girish Ch. Ghosh.—Ed.

the power of the Lord or by one's own wretched ego."

This reminds us that Jesus, Chaitanya, and other great sages also granted their redeeming protection thus to some individuals. Ordinary teachers or saints have not the power to do this. They can at best teach a few Mantras or practices by which they themselves have achieved spiritual progress. Or they may, by leading a pure life, attract others to the ideal of purity. But when men feel themselves helpless amidst the infinite bondages of the world and despair of carrying out the injunctions given for their salvation and cry out, "We cannot do these—Oh, give us the power to do them!" then the ordinary Guru is of no avail. It is beyond the power of one man to say to another, "I take the responsibility of your sins—I shall suffer for them on your behalf." Whenever there is decay of religion in the human heart, the Lord in His infinite mercy is born as a man and suffers for man's sins and releases him from the bondages of the world. He does not however allow him to go absolutely free: He makes him strive a little for his education. As Shri Ramakrishna said, "Through the grace of the Avatâras, men work out ten lives' Karma in one life." And this is true as much

of races as of individuals. This indeed is described in the Gitâ as the gift of Divine vision to Arjuna, in the Purânas as Divine mercy, in the Vaishnava literature as the salvation of Jagâi and Mâdhai<sup>1</sup> or as the subjugation of the wicked, and in Christianity as the vicarious atonement of Jesus. Without the proof of Shri Ramakrishna's life, we could scarcely have believed in its truth.

It may seem that self-surrender is an ordinary action and is easily done. Man is enslaved by his desires and seeks for advantage even in spiritual life. He wants to have worldly pleasure and Divine joy simultaneously. To him the pleasures of the world appear so sweet and delectable that the very thought of their renunciation fills him with a sense of dreadful emptiness. What will he live for then? Therefore when he is told that the "power of attorney" can be given also in spiritual life, he ecstatically thinks that he has at last found out the right thing. "Let me", so he thinks, "live my life with its iniquities and immoralites and enjoy the pleasures of the world, and let Shri Chaitanya, Jesus, or Shri Ramakrishna look after my prospects in the other world." He does not feel that it is

<sup>1</sup> Two notorious brigands of Nadia who were redeemed by Nityânanda.

nothing but wicked self-deception. He wilfully blinds himself to his evil doings lest their terrific faces should frighten him, and rushes headlong towards destruction. One day his eyes shall be uncovered and he will find himself tossed on tempestuous billows in a shoreless ocean, and he will feel that his " power of attorney " has not been accepted by anyone.

In fact, giving the " power of attorney " is not a matter of mere wish. A certain state of mind resulting from hard struggle and perseverance is an essential pre-condition. Only in that mental state can one truly give the power of attorney to the Lord, who also then actually accepts it. One must feel the unreality of worldly joys and have come to the end of one's powers after hard struggle. One must have manifested the greatest activity and realised in one's inmost heart that human power is after all limited and impotent in the face of the Ultimate Power. One must struggle hard and practise strenuous Sadhana to realise the Lord and be convinced at last that no amount of Sadhana can be adequate to know the infinite Lord. When this helplessness will come, then the piteous cry will go forth from the heart for the help and protection of a Saviour. Then and then alone will the Lord take his burden on

Himself. Otherwise, if a man finds the life of Sadhana distasteful, leads an undisciplined life, and asserts, when protested against, that he has given the power of attorney to the Lord who is therefore responsible for his actions and must change his mind if he is to do better, he really deceives himself and others, he is not sincere.

Suppose a man has given the power of attorney to the Lord and therefore thinks he has no need of practising Sadhana. If it is to be genuine, he must think of the Lord every moment of his life and of how He has rescued him from the entanglements of the world. This constant thought will inevitably inspire him with a great love and devotion for the Lord. Out of his very gratitude and love he will take the name of God and meditate on Him; he will not require to be persuaded to do so. Therefore if one, after giving the power of attorney to God, finds oneself averse to the contemplation of Him, one must infer that one's power of attorney has not been real and has not been accepted by God.

## **FAITH AND SELF-SURRENDER**

“If man realises Brahman in this life then he attains great bliss, otherwise great is his loss.” He who wants Him gets Him. It is very easy to attain Him, for He is so very kind. But who wants Him?—there is the rub. The Lord has promised that if one searches Him in the right way He will manifest Himself to such a one in the twinkling of an eye. But who searches like that? Such is the force of Mâyâ. She, the Divine Mother, has kept man so busy with other things that he finds no inclination to realise God. Shri Ramakrishna used to say that in a granary a few grains of puffed rice coated with molasses are kept in a winnowing fan. The rats eat this to their heart’s content and do not get at the bagfuls of grain stocked at the very place. Similarly, man is mad with wife, children, and other things, and never cares for the bliss of God-realisation, though He is very near, within himself. Such is Maya.

“Those who resort to Me alone cross over this Maya.” “Take refuge in Him with all thy heart. By His Grace shalt thou attain Supreme Peace and the Eternal Abode.” You

must have faith (Shraddhâ), then there is no more fear. In the spiritual world Shraddha is the one thing that leads to progress. In the Katha Upanishad we find how Nachiketâ through Shraddha attained knowledge. In Yoga philosophy also we find Shraddha praised. In the Gitâ also the Lord says, "The man with Shraddha, the devoted, the master of one's senses, attains this knowledge. Having attained knowledge one attains at once the Supreme Peace." These are facts of experience, one perceives them as it were within oneself—so what matters it how people look at it? What one experiences one does not doubt even if others say against it. One is filled with bliss. "He neither gives nor denies." It is no wonder if one attains this state through His grace. The darkness of ages is lighted up in a second by a single match stick.

"Uncle moon is everybody's uncle", goes the Bengali proverb. So is God everybody's; there is no doubt about this. Why should you feel weak? You are all children of the Divine Mother and therefore possess infinite strength. "He whose mother is the Divine Mother Herself, of whom shall he be afraid?" There can be no want of strength in Her children. Through Her grace there is infinite

power latent in you. She is really the mother, it is not a mere imagination. "Thou art the Power of Vishnu, of infinite strength art Thou, and the cause of this universe. Thou hast deluded everyone and Thy grace is what leads to liberation in this life." Such is our Mother; so what fear can there be? As one thinks, so one becomes. So if you think you are weak, weak you will become; but why should the children of the Mother think themselves weak? What is impossible for you through Her grace? How long does it take to free oneself of the ideas, "I" and "mine"? Mother through Her grace can do it for you in a moment and really She does it too.

In the Gita we find, "Having cut asunder this firm-rooted Ashvatha with the strong axe of non-attachment, that goal is to be sought for, going whither they do not return." That the children of the Divine Mother have sometimes done this, we find from the lives of great saints like Râmprasâd and Kamalâkânta. But we also find that they preferred to remain in whatever condition the Mother placed them—complete resignation to Her will. They merely wanted to remember the Mother in all conditions—whatever be those conditions in which She placed them. "In whatever condition you place me, O Mother, be it besmear-

ed with ashes or surrounded with riches, at the foot of a tree or on the King's throne—all these are good if only I do not forget Thee." Shri Ramakrishna used to say, "The cat carries the kitten and sometimes places it on a well-made bed and sometimes on a heap of ashes; but the kitten has no other cry but 'mother, mother'! Mother knows where to keep the young ones." Whatever She does is for our good. The devotees never want anything. They do not want even liberation, but only the right to serve Her.

Mother through Her sweet will can destroy everything and build everything anew in no time. Why say She can, She has done it and is doing it even now. This is not child's prattle but fact. There is no why in Her actions. She is of infinite power and beyond all cause. She is ever gracious to Her devotees and hence their everything—past, present, and future. "I am the Self, O Gudâkesha, existing in the heart of all beings; I am the beginning, the middle, and also the end of all beings." In whatever condition She places us, that is good for us—there is nothing to feel sorry over it. But then let this be our one prayer to Her—that our mind be ever fixed on Her lotus-feet, and that even if we should forget Her, She may not forget

us; that She may give us discrimination and dispassionateness, for "it is only through discrimination that one is not affected by the miseries of this world". So our one duty is to remember the Lord always. "O my savage mind, remember Râma always, what is the use of hundred other thoughts ? O mouth, repeat the name of Rama always, what is the use of vain talk? O ear, hear the life-story of Rama, what is the use of hearing sweet music etc.? O eyes, see Rama in everything; renounce everything else but Rama." This is real spiritual practice; and if one can do it, then one is saved. Otherwise it is impossible to get over life, death, and suffering. We are all children of the Mother, and there is no fear for us. We shall rest satisfied wherever She places us. We cannot say what is good and what is evil, it is beyond our reasoning and so we have to pray, "You are beyond good and evil, therefore take us also beyond them." We cannot say by what way and how She will take us; but this much is certain—that She will take us. The Master has said, "Nobody shall remain without bread. Everyone will have his bread, though some may have it early in the morning, some at noon, and some at night."

Knowledge of Brahman and such things is

not for ordinary people. For them the Lord's words : "To those whose minds are set on Me, verily I become ere long, O son of Prithâ, the Saviour out of the ocean of the mortal Samsâra (world)"; for "the goal of the Unmanifested is very hard for the embodied to reach." The knowledge of Brahman is difficult for him who has not got over the consciousness of mind and body. But then, because the knowledge of Brahman is beyond the reach of such, it is not that they should become hopeless. In this connection an incident in the life of Shri Ramakrishna flashes before my mind. One day I had been to Dakshineswar. There were many others also. One of them was a great Pundit. Shri Ramakrishna asked him to explain Vedânta. For more than an hour he explained Vedanta to the great satisfaction of Shri Ramakrishna and everybody else. But then, Shri Ramakrishna said after this, "Well, all these things, however, do not appeal to me. Your philosophising—knowledge, knower, and known, etc.—all this is good no doubt. But what I like is, 'I and my Mother alone exist and there is nothing else'." These few words he expressed with such great feeling that everyone present felt it for the time being. All the conclusions of Vedanta seemed to pale before this idea.

The Master's idea seemed to be so easy to comprehend.

The main thing is, you have to keep your mind fixed on God, whatever be the means. If that can be done, then our lives are blessed and won't be spent uselessly. Eating, drinking, etc. we shall have so long as the body lasts. But Râmprasâd, the devotee of Kâli, says, "O my mind, worship Kâli, repeat day and night the Mantra given by your Guru. In lying down think you are prostrating before the Mother, make sleep your meditation on the Mother, while eating think you are offering to Mother Shyâmâ; all sounds that enter your ears are but Mantras of the Mother, for She, Kâli, is in all letters; going round the town, think you are circumambulating the Mother. Râmprasâd declares that Mother is in everything." We have to follow the teachings of such great souls as these, and we are sure to have devotion for the Lord's feet. Is what Râmprasâd says different from the knowledge of Brahman—seeing God in everything, everywhere, in every action, and in every being? To work for the Lord, to know Him as the one object of our love, to love Him and give up all other attachments and to have no ill-feeling towards anyone—this is the easiest method to attain Him.

Love, Love, that is what is required : if we have it for Him ; then everything will be added unto us. It is not that we do not know what is love. We are habituated to love wife, children, friends, wealth, etc. This we have to direct towards God, for He is the one Reality in this world which is ever changing. Everything else in this world becomes after some time stale and even bitter. Love for Him alone is ever on the increase and ever new. With respect to other objects one gets disgusted after some time. That is why Prahlâda, the great devotee, says, "That deathless love which the ignorant have for the fleeting objects of the senses—as I keep meditating on Thee—may not that sort of intense love for Thee, slip away from my heart." If one gets such love for Him there is no more delay for God-realisation—He even comes out of the pillar to manifest Himself to His devotee. Everything is a question of love. The more one loves Him, the more He manifests Himself in one's heart. He is the friend of the sincere and pure. He is ever in our hearts, but we fail to see Him because our eyes are directed to other objects; but for this there would have been no delay in realising Him. He is ever with us, we need not go to any place of pilgrimage in search of Him. If

we but in all sincerity search Him for a moment, He comes to us. But who wants Him? Ours is mere talk, we do not want Him from our hearts. Such is the power of Maya that we fail to see the Truth. So the Lord, out of His grace, has shown us the way out also. "Those who are absolutely resigned to Me, easily cross over this Maya of Mine." "Surrender to Me"—there is no other way out. May the Lord out of His infinite grace hold our minds on to His feet—let this be our one prayer.

## **YOGA**

Every man in this world is more or less a Yogi, whether he knows it or not. A boor once heard some learned people talking about prose and poetry and thought that they must be extraordinary things beyond the reach of his conception but was surprised to learn that he had been talking in prose all his life. Similarly a great majority of human beings have some such idea about Yoga and consequently they attribute it to a very few select people who alone, according to them, have any right to be called Yogis. The reason for such a notion is that they do not know the true meaning of the word. What then does the word "Yoga" signify? It simply means concentration or fixing the mind upon a single idea, image, or object. Is it possible for any man to do any action without first concentrating his mind on it? Whenever a boy wants to learn a lesson he must be attentive to it, he must concentrate his mind upon his lesson, then alone can he master it. A goldsmith, an archer, an inventor, a painter, an astronomer, nay, any expert in any profession may be aptly called a Yogi; for all

these know how to forget all other things and concentrate their mind upon the thing of their choice, so much so that, if at that time an elephant goes by them, they are totally unaware of it.

Now this word "Yoga" has been used by sages in many different senses, among which we are concerned with four, viz the union of one self with another, to guide the current of thought towards an object, the restraining of all thought waves, and concentrating the mind on one point. The end and aim of Yoga when used in any of these senses is the same, viz Self-knowledge. The paths to realise this Self-knowledge are various. The Yogis take to various methods to attain this goal, and sometimes on their way they find many alluring things, like supernatural powers. Those who forget their ideal and are deluded by these powers get stranded. The sages classify all the various means for attaining the goal generally under four heads. These are Mantra-Yoga, Laya-Yoga, Râja-Yoga, and Hatha-Yoga. These paths were discovered at different periods by different sages. Mantra-Yoga means the attainment of concentration by the repetition of a single word or syllable symbolic of God or Truth. Laya-Yoga means the absorption of the mind

in the object of meditation. This every man practises every moment of his life, but that being always of a short duration produces no good result. I will explain this Laya-Yoga more clearly. Whenever we imagine anything, say a horse, sitting in our room, a horse invariably appears before our mental vision. Whence has this horse come? There is no real horse present, still there appears a horse before me. The natural conclusion is, that, because there is no other material present for the building up of the horse than the mind, the mind must be the material out of which the imaginary horse is created, or in other words the mind has transformed itself into the form of a horse. This shows that whenever we are imagining or thinking of something, we are becoming that. So the man who is thinking of God becomes actually God. Such people alone reap the benefit of Laya-Yoga, whereas others are mere common worldlings.

The main principle of Raja-Yoga is to control the mind and breath. I will explain to you why the control of breath is necessary for controlling the mind. Whenever we think deeply, we find that our breath is controlled. Since this holding of the breath invariably follows concentration of mind, it

was concluded that concentration of mind was sure to follow on the control and holding of the breath. Hence the control of breath is regarded as a means for mental concentration. This process is called Prâṇâyâma. Raja-Yoga, therefore, deals with these two things.

Now let us see what Hatha-Yoga is. The two sages who first taught this system are Mârkandeya and Goraksha. The systems of these two are not alike; for according to the latter, the limbs of Yoga are six, whereas the former mentions eight limbs, which view is also held by Patanjali. The six limbs which Goraksha mentions are posture, control of the breath, drawing in of the mind from all external contact, attempt to confine it within a certain limit, meditation, and the state of superconsciousness in which the consciousness of the external world vanishes. The Hatha-Yogis are particularly careful about their health, as a healthy body is necessary for concentration. Health was formerly regarded by them as a means to an end, but now it has become the end with many of them, and so the system has become corrupt, and we now seldom come across a good Hatha-Yogi.

Now it may be asked, why should we concentrate our minds at all? What good can it bring to us? Why should we hold back

our senses from coming in contact with the things of the world and thus lose that happiness which the world holds out to all? To this we can only say that no pleasure is without its corresponding misery. No pleasure of the senses is eternal—it has a beginning and an end. Everyone wants to be always happy, and he becomes extremely miserable when happiness suddenly disappears from him like a dream. This is the case with all worldly enjoyments; hence how can they be real enjoyments? In reality they are misery appearing as pleasure, enemies in the garb of friends. Therefore they are all the more dangerous. It is the duty of all wise men to get rid of all delusion. This alone can keep him safe and show him things in their proper perspective. Moreover, a man who is attached to sensual pleasures is a slave to his senses, his passions, and his appetites. Can a slave be happy? He has no individuality, he is bound by the senses, and is always at their command, even as a slave is at the command of a profligate and tyrannical master. True pleasure is in freedom. When there is none to command me, when 'I am the monarch of all I survey', then alone I can enjoy real pleasure. In the attainment of freedom lies the attainment of happiness.

Sensuality therefore cannot give rise to happiness. It lies in something else. When a man masters all his senses and becomes independent of them, then he gets a taste of real bliss and he steps into the realm of Yoga. As he proceeds, he gradually becomes all-knowing, enjoys the largest life, and has the power of sustaining his life for any length of time without food—he becomes more and more independent and therefore more and more happy.

All that man has learnt here in this world he surely has not learnt from books, but rather directly or indirectly from nature. Books are mere records of his experiences about nature. So in reality nature is our teacher. Whenever nature teaches us, we become really learned and gain something thereby not only for ourselves but for others to share. When James Watt studied the nature of steam in the boiling kettle before him, he contributed so much to the progress of man. Benjamin Franklin detected the existence of electricity in the clouds while flying a kite; and we now find electricity lighting our streets, drawing our carriages, and conveying messages from one corner of the world to another in no time. Our Indian Yogis deeply studied this book of nature and

ultimately found out the means which took them beyond nature. Through the study of the inner nature of man they became all-knowing and all-powerful. That a man can become all-knowing, they seem to have learnt from the property of a convex lens. Ordinarily the solar rays have no burning power, but when they are focussed by a lens they burn objects. This burning power at the focus is brought about by the convergence of the scattered rays of the sun to a single point. Solar rays when concentrated at one point acquire the power of burning. This fact suggested to the Yogi that because the mind is scattered through the various senses, it has but the ordinary power of knowing what is going on in the external world, and that too but partially; that if he could call the mind back from all external pursuits and concentrate it on one idea or on one point, its power is sure to increase immensely as in the case of the solar rays, and then it will be able to perceive not only these ordinary things but many extraordinary things also. He made the experiment and was successful. This intense increase in the powers of the mind was learnt not only from the property of a lens, but also from the nature of the current of a stream. If we build a dam across a flow-

ing stream keeping only a very small aperture in the embankment, the water flows out through the aperture with a thousandfold more power than in the ordinary current of the stream. This suggested to the Yogi the idea that if, by shutting up all other outlets of he mind, it is made to flow through one outlet, it must acquire powers unknown to it before. In this manner the Yogi was apprised of the extraordinary powers which mental concentration can bring into existence.

For a beginner who wants to practise Yoga the following advice is given by the sages: Upon an even and neat ground without any pebbles or flints a Yogi should sit to meditate. His environment should be pleasant and quite agreeable to his heart. No bad sight should trouble his eyes, no sudden noise should disturb his ears. When a man is half asleep, if a sudden noise disturbs him, sleep forsakes him and he is sorely troubled on that account; similarly when a man has but half affected his concentration, a sudden noise or a fearful or unpleasing sight brings him down from his height. Who can describe the pain he suffers within himself as a result of this? This is the reason why a pleasant and solitary place is necessary for a beginner.

Besides our two eyes, the Yogis speak of a

third eye. The two physical eyes can only see what is before them. But this third eye can see what is going on within, or in distant places beyond the ken of the two eyes. This third eye is called the divine eye and is located between the two eyebrows. The aim of the Yogis is to open this third eye. When the mind becomes calm, when passions and desires are rooted out from the mind, this third eye opens and enables the Yogi to see many extraordinary things. He attains eternal peace. The Self is realised. Mâyâ or illusion can no more influence him. The man dies and God rises in his place. Before the attainment of his goal the Yogi experiences many extraordinary things. He has divine visions, he sees divine forms, smells divine fragrance, and hears the celestials talking. Within his body he sometimes hears the sound of a bell or the music of a flute; sometimes he sees his Ishta in the lotus of his heart and so on. We cannot easily account for all these phenomena. But when any fortunate man is blessed with these extraordinary visions, then his goal is near at hand.

Whatever progress and success humanity has achieved ever since the creation of the world is all due to the concentration of the mind. The leaders of our civilisation during

the early ages were men who were really Yogis. Every invention, every new discovery is purely the outcome of concentration. A poet, a philosopher, a scientist, a warrior—all these have to be Yogis in the first place; then alone can they turn out to be great. Although these may not style themselves Yogis, they are actually so. A rose called by any other name will not be the less sweet for that. You should all be good Yogis, and then alone can you be ideal men among mankind. In whatever station of life you may be, if you can concentrate your mind, you are sure to be the best in that field. When such is the case, is it not the duty of all to struggle hard to attain this mental concentration? Concentration is the mother of untold wealth, both material and spiritual.

## **PRANAYAMA**

By “Sâdhanâ” is meant the means of realising God or the Âtman. Everyone must take to Sadhana, be he a follower of the path of devotion or of knowledge. None can ever attain the desired end without adopting proper means for that. Those who follow the path of devotion believe in dualistic philosophies and think that the Lord lives in various forms in different heavens known as Goloka, Shivaloka, Vaikunthaloka, etc. Their highest aim is to go after death, through the Lord's grace, to where He abides for ever. Even they must undergo spiritual practices like worship, telling of beads, meditation, reading of the scriptures, holding of conversations on the Lord, etc. As they progress in such practices, they begin to like solitude, and often plunge into the depths of meditation on the Lord after bringing the senses under control. These devotees, however, do not want to merge themselves completely in the Lord, they like to keep up between themselves and God the relationship of the servant and the master. But they find joy in meditating on Him, in repeating and chanting His name, in

having holy conversations with other devotees and in serving all creatures, realising that He resides in all. From this it is clear that although before taking to spiritual practices they may think that the Lord resides in various forms in different heavens entirely removed from this world, yet gradually this idea of theirs gets refined, and they realise that the heart of man is the abode of God, that, that is the real heaven—Goloka, Shivaloka, or the like. When the heart is purified by these spiritual practices, the fortunate devotee sees the Lord manifested in his own heart. And then it is that all controversies—the outcome of the undeveloped intellect of dualists and monists—are silenced and peace is attained.

One who treads the path of knowledge, who says, "Brahman alone is true and the universe is false", or "not this, not this", whose highest aim is to realise "I am Brahman"—even he takes to spiritual practices such as having faith in the words of the Guru and the scriptures, renouncing all desires of enjoying the fruits of one's work in this life or the next, control of the mind and the senses, endurance, and withdrawal of thoughts from sense-objects. To go to the above-mentioned heavens where God is popularly believed to reside, and to have enjoyments etc., he does

not covet. To him even these things are transitory and within the domain of the mind. He wants to go even beyond the mind, to attain a state which no speech can describe, no mind can peep into. He does not want that state where men are taken by their merits and on the exhaustion of which by enjoyment they again enter this mortal world. He knows that he who sees the manifold here goes from death to death, that is, he who, in this very birth, in this very body, fails to realise the identity of the Jiva (individual soul) and Brahman has to go the round of births and deaths. This liberated soul, again, sees the Self in all and is, therefore, engaged also in their service. And through him are done works that are highly beneficial to the world.

From this we understand that whichever path people may take to realise God, they must all engage in spiritual practices. The scriptures, too, mention different means to spiritual attainment; and Prânâyâma is one of them. In modern times many practise Pranayama with the object of getting sound health or for some other ulterior motive. Such mechanical Pranayama is positively injurious and not a few have been cheated, suffering the fate of "blind men led by the blind"; and some have even met with premature death.

Pranayama is very easy to understand—so easy that anyone will understand it when told. We all practise this Pranayama every day unconsciously; and it is very easy to practise also. When you read a sensational story-book or the history of a new country, or are engaged in solving a difficult mathematical problem, you become so much absorbed in it that so long as the story is not finished or the problem not solved, you cannot tear yourself away from it. On such occasions if you but pay attention to your breathing you will find that it has become very, very slow—as if much of the breath is retained within the lungs. While reading sad tales we find that our heart becomes heavy and that cheerful news makes it buoyant. In either case there is a marked change in respiration. If you read an extremely pathetic story, you lessen the heaviness of your heart by shedding tears; or in case of high exultation, you do it by laughter, sometimes accompanied by tears of joy. But the thing specially to be noted in both the cases is that the breathing, which is the effect of the vital force (Prâna), gets partially controlled. From these examples it is evident that when the mind is deeply concentrated on any matter, the function of respiration naturally slows down or stops—Pranayama is done

automatically. It is necessary to notice one thing more—when you are thus reading deeply or solving a mathematical problem, if you turn your attention away from those works to see whether your respiration has slowed down, you will see it is gradually assuming its normal state. But it will be clear to you that it had slowed down and is again becoming normal. If we compare this latter fact with our former conclusion, we see that whenever the mind is deeply concentrated on a certain thought, respiration is automatically controlled, and that the thought is of primary importance and the control of respiration only secondary. So without being conscious of it, we do Pranayama every day.

Now let us see what this Pranayama as a means to spiritual attainment is. Is this also something that follows as a matter of course, or something that is to be brought about artificially? Are these spiritual practices themselves natural processes, or are they not?

The plain answer to this is that the adoption of this means is but natural and all the means prescribed by the scriptures are so, even as hunger and thirst are natural to our bodies and the means adopted by men to satisfy them, though various, are equally natural. Everyone has a fixed time when he

feels hungry. One cannot feel hungry merely at seeing others taking food. If he does, it shows that his stomach, too, is empty, that it is time he should take food and appease his hunger. But if, on seeing others take food, one wants to eat without feeling hungry, he must have recourse to artificial means to rouse his hunger ; and such persons are sure to injure their health. Again, if a man does not feel hungry at all, it is a sure indication that he has got some disease and should take some medicine. And medicines often do cure such persons.

As in the physical world, so in the spiritual. Those who are obsessed with fear or are engaged merely in eating, sleeping, and indulging in their passions, may have the human body, but inwardly they are little removed from the brutes. Those who lack in God-consciousness, who do not try to realise Him, who do not cultivate the company of sages or read the scriptures, or practise charity, or have love for the fatherland, and are devoid of other good qualities—they cannot be called *men*. They find it difficult to abide by the laws of human society—in fact, they cannot.

Just as the satisfaction of bodily wants, harmless enjoyments, study, service to parents,

polite dealings with friends and relatives are natural requirements of every man worth the name and are generally observed by all, so also the spiritual practices are natural requirements of the soul and are performed in some form or other by all decent people. Impelled by their natural hankerings, some are engaged in spiritual practices. Others look at them and think that their time, too, has come and sincerely take to those practices. There are others again, who wish to practise them before their hour has struck in imitation of others, and like persons adopting artificial means for rousing hunger, they, in the domain of spirituality, adopt various spiritual means such as cultivating the company of sages, study of the scriptures and Pranayama. But not having a genuine religious hankering, they unfortunately get hypocrites as their spiritual guides. Thus, debarred from the knowledge of the true significance of the scriptures, they are engaged in doing Pranayama etc., mechanically, with the result that they contract some disease, and what is most harmful, they incur in the long run an aversion for religion. And this life of theirs is spent in vain. In the spiritual realm there is no worse disease than aversion for religion. Particularly, when people come to such a

mental condition after some haphazard attempts at spiritual practice, their case is almost incurable. Lastly, there is another class of men who are such great victims of spiritual dyspepsia that they do not feel the slightest inclination for spiritual practices, even though they see thousands of men engaged in such practices before their very eyes. But "there are good souls, calm and magnanimous, who do good to others as does the spring, and who having themselves crossed this dreadful ocean of birth and death, help others also to cross the same, without any selfish motive whatsoever". They are spiritual doctors indeed. If such great souls, out of compassion, undertake to cure them of their spiritual dyspepsia, then surely it is of great help to them. Thereby they get a real spiritual hankering.

Now the most important of spiritual practices are meditation and repetition of some holy name imparted by the Guru. The selfless service to the Guru, holy company, the reading of good books, etc., bring about a loving and reverential attitude toward such meditation and repetition of names, and also a greater control and concentration of mind. All aspirants after God-realisation, be they followers of the path of knowledge (Jnânis)

or of devotion (Bhaktas), must practise meditation and repetition of holy names. The Jnâni should repeat the holy syllable "Om" ; and the Bhakta, the holy name of Shiva, Târa, Hari, and so on. Every aspirant after God-realisation must have a constant remembrance of the Lord ; and the chief means of doing this is the repetition of His holy name with love and reverence.

Now, what kind of Pranayama leads to God-realisation ? Is it by mechanical Pranayama alone that one can realise God ? Never. Shri Ramakrishna used to say, "Great is the attachment of a mother to her child, of a devoted wife to her husband, and of a miser to his wealth. If one can luckily feel such attachment for God, then one can realise God within a short time." When the heart is filled with such intense longing for God, respiration almost stops. In that state, repetition of holy names, meditation, singing of devotional songs, reading of the scriptures—whatever the Sâdhaka (aspirant) does, is done with great concentration, love, and devotion, and that condition of respiration is what is called Pranayama. Otherwise the mechanical restraint of breath or slow breathing, without any love, longing or reverence for God, is of no use for the attainment of knowledge or devotion.

In two<sup>1</sup> of the aphorisms on the Yoga philosophy Patanjali says that Yoga means the control of the wanderings of the mind and that in the state of Yoga the individual soul or the seer rests in the Paramâtman (supreme soul), which is its real nature; and various means have been described for gradually bringing about this state. All these have been told for those alone who are eager to get that state. Those who have attained a purified state of mind by serving their spiritual guides, by continence, and by hearing and thinking on the real import of the scriptures as interpreted by such guides, get an intellectual grasp of their real nature. Then their minds are gradually immersed in deep meditation, and Pranayama follows naturally. Otherwise impure minds are never freed from doubts as to their real nature; they never attain to that knowledge. But with the direct perception of one's real nature comes Samâdhi or the complete absorption of the individual self in the Cosmic Self. This is the apex of Pranayama—then there comes about a total annihilation of all difference between

<sup>1</sup> "Yoga is restraining the mindstuff from taking various forms", "At that time (the time of concentration) the seer rests in his own (unmodified) state" (I. 2, 3).

meditation, meditator, and the objects of meditation.

So it comes to this—that Pranayama comes of itself to those who repeat the Lord's holy name and think and meditate on Him with devout and intense longing. In the spiritual life the result of this is immeasurable. In practical life also there is a growth of mental powers, purity of character, peace of mind, charity, resolute will, etc. In other words, there is no doubt that through the Lord's grace an infinitesimal fraction of His infinite glory filters into His devotee. Reverence, devotion, and the company of sages are the easiest means of attaining this. Of these, again, the company of sages is of prime importance. It is through the Lord's special grace that one is favoured with such company. The Vedas, too, say, "To know that, he, with sacrificial fuel in hand (i.e., being ready to render any kind of service), must approach a Guru who is well versed in the Vedas and absolutely established in Brahman."

## **THE REAL NATURE OF MAN**

Every object in this world has peculiar characteristics of its own. They distinguish it from others and give it an individuality. These characteristics which give it its individuality are called its nature. So if one knows the nature of an object, one knows the object fully. Such knowledge of an object is called true knowledge. To have a true knowledge of an object, therefore, one must know its nature. This nature manifests as attraction and repulsion. It likes to acquire something and repulse certain other things. With some it is, so to say, eternally bound in love, and with some others it bears eternal hatred. All objects are divided into two classes, viz inanimate and animate objects. Even among inanimate objects, we find these forces of attraction and repulsion. As for example, darkness is compatible with darkness and not with light. Thus objects of similar nature combine and not those of contrary natures. Watery things do not get mixed with oily substances, because their natures differ. Watery substances get mixed with watery substances, and oily substances

with oily ones. Even in the vegetable kingdom, one finds these forces of attraction and repulsion. Air, light, and water are liked and absence of water, extreme heat, and darkness are hated. A creeper which subsists on water, light, and air tends to grow in that direction where it can get the light of the sun ; however much you may try, you will not succeed in turning its direction towards shade. If you put it today in this latter direction, you will find the next day that it has turned its course towards light. Its nature is to love sunlight and hate shade or darkness. So there is no doubt that both inert matter and the vegetable kingdom are swayed by attraction and repulsion.

It will not be too much to say that the animal world also is guided by these two forces of attraction and repulsion, of love and hatred. Cows and other herbivorous animals take green grass, creepers, and leaves, but carnivorous animals, like the tiger, are not fond of them. Every animal is guided by these likes and dislikes, and we have to fix their nature by these likes and dislikes.

Though we see two forces, love and hatred, yet in reality they are but the two aspects of a single force, love. It is because we like light, we hate darkness, the reverse of it. So,

as hatred is also due to love, we have to say that hatred is nothing but another aspect of love. Love attracts, hatred repels; love is something positive while hatred is something negative; in other words, love is a reality while hatred is unreal. So the nature of everything is love. What one wants is his nature, and what one hates is contrary to his nature. Fish want to live in water, and so it is their nature. Again, life out of water they hate, so it is contrary to their nature.

Likewise, if we examine human nature, we find that it is also made up of love and hatred. Love for happiness and hatred for misery, who does not possess? Similarly everyone is seen to love life and fear death. Again, an intelligent man ever thirsts after knowledge. He hates ignorance even as the sun hates darkness. His nature is to love knowledge and hate ignorance. From these likes of his, we easily find that his nature is happiness and not misery; life is his nature and not death; and again, knowledge is his nature and not ignorance. Enjoyment is bliss, life is existence, and knowledge is consciousness. So the Rishis arrived at the conclusion that man's true nature is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

If man is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Abso-

lute, it follows that which undergoes change or destruction is not man. The embodied individual undergoes birth and death, and so is not the real man. So also he who works and thinks, he who is the agent and the knower is not the real man, because he does not exist in deep sleep ; for that which is existence itself can never be destroyed or become non-existent. So the seers say that the real man is beyond the five Koshas (physical sheaths). The man who is circumscribed by the five sheaths is only an apparent man. The real man, because he is not limited by the five sheaths, is infinite, all-pervading, greater than the greatest. This is the conclusion of the Aryan Rishis.

Though man, in his real nature, is Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss, yet all men think of themselves as having name and form, as Mr. or Mrs. So-and-so, possessing attributes, subject to death, and they are satisfied with this view about them. They do not look as being eternal, without parts, and full of bliss. Like pots and other objects, they too are destructible, subject to their environment, tossed to and fro by happiness and misery, ever craving—in short, objects of pity. All their energy is spent up in eating, drinking, and sleeping, and they are always subject

to fear. If anyone among them wants to lead a different life, he has to give it up at once, seeing the attitude of his wife, children, relations, and friends. So this world has been going on unbroken from time without beginning with these people wholly addicted to eating and drinking. Only now and then at great intervals, a few individuals raise their heads high above the billows of the world and call out at the top of their voice : "To live like brutes is not the aim of human life. Realise your true Self and save yourselves from the ocean of misery." Hearing this, some rouse themselves from their sleep ; and seeing the benign face of such enlightened souls and hearing their teachings which are easy of understanding, they get new life and strength in them. They too raise themselves above this world of misery and, from the words of these great souls, realise that the only object which can give them freedom from bondage is shining before them ; that in search of it they have been suffering in this unreal world so long ; and that, that object exist beyond this world of the senses which is full of fear and misery : thus knowing the truth, they too become blessed. Now and then the people of this miserable world get beyond it through the help of some en-

lightened soul or other. Such great souls also come now and then for the salvation of these miserable creatures. It is because such great souls, whose hearts feel for the misery of others, come now and then to this world, that there is an end to the suffering of these miserable creatures. Otherwise this world would have been a regular hell, and the darkness of ignorance would never have been dispelled.

## **SELF-KNOWLEDGE**

### **I**

The Self of man is formless, and therefore infinite. For form is that which is bounded on all sides and therefore that which is formless must be limitless. And it is also conscious and therefore it is infinitely conscious ; hence it is all-knowing. Though the rational conclusion is that man is by his very nature all-knowing and infinite, yet in actual life, we see that he is bound. Why ? Because he confounds the body with his Self ; he wants to be embodied. He does not discriminate between the real and the unreal. What is real ? That which always exists is real. Here is a chair. There was a time when it did not exist (as a chair) and there will come a time when it will not exist (as such). Of course the materials of which the chair is made existed before the chair was made and will continue to exist, in some form or other, even after the chair is destroyed. Matter is indestructible, it is true. But we are speaking of the particular thing called a chair. That thing is destructible. Remember, therefore,

that when we say a thing is not real, we do not mean that it did not, and will not, exist in some form or other, but that it did not and will not always exist as that particular thing. The whole universe we see, is therefore, unreal for it is ever changing. The macrocosm is thus seen to be unreal and the microcosm too is unreal, because the microcosm is only a part of the macrocosm. This body that man thinks to be his real Self is actually unreal. It was born and it must die. Still we cling to it as the only real thing in the world, as the only thing worth having. What is more strange than this? Though man sees thousands dying around him every day, he hopes that he will somehow be an exception, and will continue to live. Even the miserable leper does not want to die. Why this stubborn clinging to the body? Because man wants to be happy, and as he identifies himself with the body, he thinks that he can be happy only so long as his body lasts. Birds are caught in this way: A number of short bamboo tubes are strung upon a rope whose ends are securely tied to the high branches of two trees wide apart. The birds see this long string of bamboo tubes and thinking it will make an excellent perch for them, come down in flocks. But as soon as

they sit down, the bamboo tubes roll and they all hang head downwards. And such is their fear of death that they cling to their perches and lose the only chance of saving themselves from the hunter's bag by refusing to use their wings. Like these foolish birds that forget they have wings and cling to the bamboos as the only way of escaping death, and thus get caught, man in his foolishness thinks that the body is his only hope and that if the body falls his happiness will also vanish. He forgets that his body is not his real Self and that if he gives up the body he will be enjoying the greatest bliss.

The desire for happiness, and the attachment to the body in the belief that only the body can give him that happiness, are the two causes that bind man down to ignorance. A Sâdhu was pleased with a confectioner and offered to send him to heaven. But so greatly attached was he to all that he thought was his own—his children, his shop, his house, his fields and his wealth—that he preferred to live on as a confectioner and see his children grow up and prosper, then to reincarnate as a bull to till his neglected fields, then as a dog to watch his house, and then as a serpent to guard his treasure, until at last out of pity, the Sâdhu took the matter into

his own hands and sent him to heaven. And why this attachment? Because these things gave him happiness; he was not conscious of any higher happiness. But death knows no distinction, and sooner or later, every man dies. High fever drives out the soul from its bodily tenement. Very unwillingly, man leaves the body; but however unwillingly, he must. A man has a most beautiful house, and is passionately fond of it; but if it is on fire, does he not leave it, albeit with the greatest regret?

But the desire for happiness, Ânanda, is a very natural desire. Suppose you take a fish out of water and ask it if it would like to be the emperor of the world, or have a filthy pond to live in. What would be its answer? Of course it chooses the pond, for water is its element; it cannot live without it. Similar is the case with man. He wants to be happy because his very nature is Bliss. In reality he is born of Happiness, lives in Happiness and ends in Happiness. But he commits a serious blunder; he identifies himself with his body, and with the happiness which that body can give.

Thus though we grasp intellectually that we are free and all-knowing, when it comes to practice, we become cowards. We may

be very sincere, yet we are powerless. Such is the terrible power of Mâyâ. To talk Vedânta is very easy, but to practise it is very hard indeed.

Therefore all religions teach the necessity of hero-worship. Who is a hero? The man who has realised his oneness with God, who has Self-knowledge; for religion is not a matter of talk or learning or faith, but a matter of realisation. It is only such a man that has a right to speak of God. All others are blind; and if they talk of God, it will be like the blind man leading the blind and both falling into the ditch. A man of realisation alone is the true teacher, the Guru. So you must hear, study, understand, and then try to realise with the aid of a real Guru. Gurus nowadays are very cheap, just as books are cheap, but these Gurus cannot help.

What should be your attitude towards your Guru? You must love him more than anything else, more than your own self even. His words must be laws to you. It is only then that you will heed his advice. Then if he constantly dins into your ears, "My child, this world is false and fleeting; get above it," you will obey him, and gradually strength will come to you, and you will control your outgoing senses. Therefore, you must have a

Guru, and have Guru-Bhakti, devotion to the Guru, for true religion to begin for you.

Perhaps you will say, "But where am I to get such a Guru?" I can only answer, "Where there is a will, there is a way." Practise meditation. Select one day out of a month, or even three months, and make it wholly your own. Serve the world all the other days, but that one day let none claim. Retire to a solitary place and meditate. Meditate upon the false and fleeting nature of the world, upon your own inherent freedom and knowledge, that death is sure sooner or later, and that nothing in the world can save you from death, but yourself. Tell yourself, "Naked have I come from my mother's womb and naked shall I have to go." Think upon the glory of soul, and commune with this constant and watchful friend of yours. Learn to live with him, to enjoy his company and to yearn for none else. If you do this, you will gain in strength; and when, by such meditation, you shall have made yourself fit for it, the Guru will also come, and you will be blessed and happy.

## II

Ordinarily we have three states of consciousness—the waking, the dreaming, and the deep sleep. In our waking state, we experience through our sense-organs this manifold universe spread in infinite time and space. Then it is brought home to us how insignificant this earth is in comparison with the universe. When the astronomers want to calculate the distance, size, etc. of heavenly bodies, they imagine this earth, which appears so big to us, to be but a point. When the earth is taken to be a point, then there occurs no mistake in calculations. And it is through such calculations that they have correctly estimated the distance and size of many a luminary. According to higher mathematics, zero is the least number and does not mean a complete nonentity. It is that number less than which we cannot conceive. This granted, it is not unreasonable to call the earth a zero. For "big", "small", etc. are relative terms. When we say a thing is small, we mean it is so as compared with another bigger thing. Hence when a limited thing is compared with infinite space, it is but natural that the latter will be infinite times greater than the former, and the finite thing but an infinitesimal part

of the infinity. Or in other words, the finite thing is a zero in comparison with the infinite. When this immense earth with its innumerable rivers and mountains, its encircling oceans, its infinite variety of vegetable and animal species appears to be so trifling, then a small creature like myself becomes quite insignificant. This is the verdict of reason on our waking state.

But such a conclusion is not pleasing to us. No one gets satisfaction by thinking himself low or insignificant. Ask a man if he is satisfied with his present condition. He may be a millionaire, he may own hundreds of servants, his fame may encircle the whole globe, and he may have loving parents, a faithful wife, and healthy, beautiful, polite, obedient, well-educated, and youthful children; yet all these give him but a temporary satisfaction of possessing all that is desired; for you ask him if all his desires have been fulfilled, and he at once says what a large number of things he still wants. For man with such a nature, it is impossible to be contented with a poor idea of himself. There is no end to man's desires, his hankerings. If the whole world be placed at his disposal, will he be happy, contented? The desire to attack the moon will at once flash in his mind, then the sun,

then one by one all the planets and stars. When at last there will be left nothing which he does not possess, then alone will he find peace. That is, when he will be one with the whole universe, with infinity itself, and not before that, will he reach the climax of his satisfaction.

Though this is the hidden truth of man's nature, yet he is ordinarily seen to be satisfied. The reason for this lies in his insignificance as compared with the vastness of the universe. When man comes to think of himself as of a certain length, breadth, and thickness, having a name and form, going through the rounds of births and deaths, possessing a very limited amount of vital and mental energy—that is, as circumscribed in every way, then he is forced to have a low estimate of himself, and consequently thinks himself lucky if he could anyhow pass his life as an ordinary man. But we have shown that the inner man is not pleased with it. Why then does he identify himself with this body? There is a deeper reason for this. Man longs for happiness and he hates both pain and absence of pleasure. And if he is to get this happiness, he is to take the help of the sense-organs. Charming beauty, sweet music, pleasing breeze, delicious food, fragrance of pretty

flowers, fine words in praise of self, glorifying works, thrilling words of love—everything that is pleasing to the mind comes through these sense-organs; and the body is but the sum total of these organs; hence so much faith on, and love for the body. So long as he thinks this body to be the instrument with which he gets pleasure, he must have a very deep love for it. But it is only a partial truth, a one-sided view. These sense-organs are the cause not only of pleasure but also of pain. This world is not made up merely of things beautiful and pleasing to the senses. In it there are more ugly things than beautiful ones, more harsh, jarring notes than melodious ones, more malodorous things than fragrant ones, more stale and insipid articles of food than tasteful ones, more things disagreeable to the touch than the opposite. So the organs have more power to give painful sensations to us than pleasant ones. Not only this. Although man takes so much care of the body, spends most of his time in its service, and thinks it to be his very self and wants it for all eternity, yet it leaves him at length in a most cruel way. This is what he gains by his lifelong service to it. This body for which he takes so much care and which he thinks to be so near and dear to him—

that very body lingers not a moment for him, casts not a look behind when death approaches! Is it a matter of little regret?

For gain man serves others. That which gives him pleasure, that which gives life—that he serves. But if it causes pain instead, it should be shunned at once. Is not this taking care of our bodies of this nature? It might be said, "It causes pain no doubt, but it yields pleasure too." But tell me what you want, pleasure with pain, or without the least tinge of it. It might be argued, "Pleasure without the least tinge of pain is an impossibility on earth and so it is better to have half a loaf than no bread at all, for hunger has to be appeased. We do it because there is no other alternative. We would not have taken recourse to this, had there been any other alternative." Let us see if there is really any other course, for if there is, it should be the duty of the wise to take pains to achieve that. After what great labour does man succeed in getting a little pleasure mixed with so much of pain! And is it to be expected that infinite happiness can be had without labour? Surely one will have to struggle hard to get it.

Let us see wherein lies the possibility of such happiness. To be sure, it is not in the body. All pleasures derived through the

body begin and end in pain. "Like a wheel, pleasures and pains go round and round." So it is not in the body; nor is it in the world outside, for pleasures derived therefrom have also to come through the body. So comes in the question of Atman; but is there an Atman apart from the body? To reason out this question we are to take into account the fact that in our waking state in this transitory world, there is not a single thing which does not change. Permanence of things is an impossibility here. The world is not stationary at any place. Heat expands and cold contracts bodies—it is a universal law. And again, the amount of heat varies every moment. So there is not a single thing in this world that remains the same even for two consecutive moments. In fact, this constant change of things is what gives us the idea of time. Where there is no change, where sameness prevails, there cannot be any idea of time with its three divisions—past, present, and future; for without the perception of change how is the idea of past and future possible? So change is time. It might be said that space is unchanging. On space (as the base) goes on the play of time, just as a drama is enacted on a stage that is permanent and remains the same amidst changes. On

the stage of this one, infinite, unchanging vacuity of space is being enacted this wonderful drama of the universe from all eternity. But let me just ask: What is this space? Where there is length, breadth, and thickness, there comes in the idea of space; but where there is none of them, how can there be space? So space is infinite vacuity without beginning or end and having length, breadth, and thickness. But these three are but measures, and measures can never be immeasurable. Hence the ideas of length, etc. are incompatible with the idea of infinity. All the three have both beginning and end; that is, they are measures of finite, limited things. So if the idea of space having no length, etc. be impossible and if these length, etc. be always finite, then we are to understand that it is through the existence of things that any idea of the existence of space is possible. It has been shown before that all things undergo changes. There can be no doubt that that thing must itself be changeful whose existence depends on those everchanging things. So space also is changeful. So it comes to this, that in the external world there is nothing which does not undergo modifications every moment.

Another proof as to the changing nature of space can be adduced. When we have no

knowledge of "I" and "you" or "this" and "that", the perception of space is impossible. When there is no knowledge of duality, when there abides but one, indivisible, all-pervading entity above all duality, then neither time, nor space, nor causality remains. So to make possible the perception of space or ether, two things are necessary. Two things qualified by the adjectives "this" and "that" are at the root of our knowledge of space, hence it must be admitted that on the existence or non-existence of things depends the existence or non-existence of space. Things change, hence space too changes.

Another word. Things which change are not independent—they are always seen to depend on others. They are dependent on that which causes their modifications. From this the converse may be concluded, viz that which is independent does not change; it is unchanging and homogeneous. And nowhere in this world do we find such an independent thing which remains eternally the same. Now let us see if such a permanent thing can be found within this body of ours, constituted of the five elements. If I were this body, I must have births and deaths, hence must be changeful. Side by side with our idea, "I am body", is another idea which

is also ingrained in our nature and which casts doubt on the former idea. Such ideas as "my hand", "my leg", "my body" also are quite natural to me. But how can what is "my" be what is "I"? Again, it is but for a few years that I have connection with this body. Were I the mind, then too, it is evident that I am ever changing. But the idea of "my mind" separates me from the mind. Though under the influence of one phase of my nature I get identified with body and mind, still under the influence of the other phase I get separated from them. Had I really been this body and mind, it would never have been possible for me to feel myself distinct from them. Just as sugar or salt can never give up its own natural taste of sweetness or salineness, similarly had I and my body been the same, it would have been impossible for me to shake off my "bodyhood" as it is impossible for me to deny my "I-ness". But inasmuch as I can easily think myself distinct from my body and mind, I am surely different from either. Again, from a comparison of the nature of body and mind with that of "I", we come to know that with infancy, childhood, youth, etc., body and mind have changed; but the same "I" which was once a child and passed through adolescence,

youth, etc. has now reached the threshold of age—body and mind have changed but the same “I” persists as unchanged as ever. There is no change in *me*. Under all conditions I am that selfsame one. Even in dream I am that same witness of my body and mind. It may be said, “Where is your existence in dreamless sleep? Then certainly you lose your I-consciousness.” But that is not true. Had the “I” been annihilated in deep, dreamless sleep, it could not have waked up again, for that which is destroyed cannot get back its existence. It might be argued that a new “I” is created after the deep sleep. In that case the present “I”, having no connection with the past “I”, it would be completely ignorant of what had happened to the past “I”. But the fact is just the opposite. A person, on waking up, admits all the acts that he did since the beginning of his life, as his own. This shows that no new “I” is created after the deep sleep, which again proves that even during that sleep the “I” was existing. Another proof of this is that after waking I remember that I slept. What is felt before is remembered, what I have not seen or heard can never rise up in my memory. Hence it follows that because during the sleep I had the consciousness that I was sleeping,

I remember that afterwards, when I wake up. For memory is the mental re-experience of what has been actually experienced before. It comes to this, then, that as in the dream and wakeful states, the "I" persists as pure consciousness in the state of dreamless sleep too. I am the witness of the three states of consciousness, one, homogeneous—the only one which is eternally the same in the midst of a universe in constant flux. Not to be changed or to be modified—that is my nature. Hence I do not depend on others like those that change—I am independent. And because independent, I am eternal, I am extremely unwilling to die, so if there is none over me, if I am in every way free to act according to my will, I would not allow the vile death to come near me. The destruction of existence, to cease to be, is what is called death. So if I am the Lord of death, how is my annihilation possible? I was, before I took this body; I shall be even when I give it up. I am eternal, omnipresent; for all the things that change, must do so on a permanent unchangeable substratum. Everything save me undergoes change or modification. So on me, the only unchanging entity, is superimposed this entire universe of change. I pervade all.

Still another proof of my permanence is this: "Who is there that doubts his own existence? Even if there be any doubt about this in your mind, then the doubter himself is you." So there ought not to be any doubt as to one's own existence. Every man is a positive entity. Existence can never be non-existent, can never cease to be. Hence I am eternal, omnipresent, and therefore omniscient; and because free, therefore of exceeding bliss.

But this "I" does not measure so many cubits. There is a world of difference between the "I" that has a name and a form and this "I". One "I" is subject to births and deaths, disease and dotage, miseries and shortcomings; the other "I" is always the same, omnipresent, immovable, unchangeable, eternal. The one "I" thinks itself a man or a god, a Brâhmaṇa or a non-Brâhmaṇa, a monk or a householder; the other "I" is devoid of all limiting adjuncts, is contented with itself, eternally abiding in pure consciousness. The one "I" is always feeling a creepy sensation about it, is always afraid of dangers; the other "I", fully conscious of its absolute nature, is never afraid of anything, and being the vastest is known as Brahman. The one "I" with the heavy load of Karma

on its shoulders is going about from door to door (i.e., transmigrating); the other "I", standing far above all merits and demerits, is abiding in its absolute blissful nature. The one "I" is passing its miserable days in the slavery of the ever changeful, indescribable enchantress—nature; the other "I", Lord of nature, is enjoying bliss inseparable through the sportive creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the universe. The one "I" is bound down to the three modes of Prakriti (nature)—Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas; the other "I" is far above them and is eternally free. The one "I", being compelled to transmigrate, is suffering unspeakable miseries; the other "I" is beautifying its absolute nature through the sportive projection of these transmigrations (the apparent diversity is lending beauty to the real unity, the true "I"). The one "I" is false and full of miseries; the other "I" is true and full of bliss.

That "I" of the man who identifies himself with the body is the false "I". It is through devoted service to the spiritual guide (Guru) that one is disillusioned from this false notion. "To him alone, who is supremely devoted to the Lord and the spiritual guide, is revealed the true meaning of the words spoken by the great seers." And none

else but they enjoy bliss unspeakable. So there is no other road to disillusionment but this devotion to one's spiritual guide. If you want to transcend body and mind and to enjoy the absolute bliss born of the knowledge of Brahman, just engage yourself with a whole-hearted devotion in the service of your Guru. There is no way but this.

## **PATHS TO REALISATION**

Dvaita, Advaita, or whatever else you may say, everything depends on the mind. If a person can realise that he is the Ātman, then he attains the Advaita consciousness automatically; but if there is the consciousness of mind, body, etc., then there is duality. It is only when one gets the consciousness of being the Atman that duality vanishes, and the Atman becomes manifest everywhere. Is not all the trouble due to the Upādhi or superimposed qualities? The ideas I am So-and-so, So-and-so's son, of such and such caste, or I possess such and such qualities, lead to duality. But if one can think—I am not the mind, the body or the intellect, but the Atman, which is pure, free from sin, Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss, how can there be duality? But mere talk will not do; one has to realise it. Just as one is now rooted in the idea that one is So-and-so, similarly when one becomes firmly established in the consciousness that one is the Atman, then only will there be the Advaita consciousness. It is to attain to this Advaita consciousness that one has to go through dualistic spiritual

practices; for we are fixed in dualistic consciousness. We have to purify it gradually by establishing an intimate relationship with God. Now we are related with the world; this has to be given up and relationship is to be established with God. If this relationship with God is established in its fullness, then duality will vanish by itself and there will be left only God. This little "I" will vanish. This is how the Advaita goal is attained through Upâsanâ (worship), through dualism.

There is another method of reaching the Advaita goal—through discrimination, the "not this", "not this" process; denying everything now and here—at this very moment, denying that I am the body, mind, and the intellect, and thinking that I am the Atman which is Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss. I do not cease to exist when the body falls away. Happiness, misery, etc. are mere states of the mind and do not belong to me. I am beyond speech, mind, etc.,—the infinite Atman, the One without a second. But this is not a joke. Merely repeating this will not make us attain to that state. This impersonal worship is not for everyone. That is why the Lord says in the Gitâ, "The goal of the Unmanifested is very hard for the embodied

to reach. But those who worship Me, resigning all actions to Me, regarding Me as the Supreme Goal, meditating on Me with single-minded Yoga—for those whose mind is set on Me, verily I become ere long, O Son of Prithâ, the saviour out of the ocean of this mortal Samsâra (relative existence)."

If one can depend on Him absolutely, one gets this help, He Himself sets everything right. But is this also easy? Is any and everyone able to do this? Not so. Even this is possible only if there is the grace of the Lord, or if one is so fortunate as to get the company of some great soul; otherwise not. Mere talk will not do. One has to learn how to examine the contents of one's mind. These one has to purify and offer to the Lord. Is this so easy? If even after a lifelong struggle one gets this attitude, one becomes blessed. On the whole, it is not a joke. Be it dualism or monism, to get truly established in any one of these is very difficult. The author of *Bodhasâra* talking of the difference between Dvaita and Advaita says, "Some worship Him saying 'I am Thine.' Others again as 'I am Thyself.' Though there is a slight difference between the two, yet the result of both is the same." The Dualist says, "I am Thine", and the Advaitist says, "I am Thee"; yet

the result is the same in both cases, namely, the destruction of ignorance and misery. There is no difference as regards that. Whatever view appeals to one, one is at liberty to accept. But then that attitude should be pure. If my attitude is monistic, then I have to deny the body, mind, intellect, etc. The moment I say, "I am the Atman", happiness and misery will have to vanish, and I must realise that I am "partless, actionless, calm, faultless, and taintless". If I regard myself as His child or His servant, then I must be contented with what He does with me, or wherever He may place me, and must surrender myself to Him with the absolute faith that it is all for my own good. Both attitudes are difficult. Both have to be practised for long. But the result of both is the same—the destruction of Samsâra and the attainment of bliss. Let one select whichever ideal one likes, but one must put it into practice with all sincerity, without any inconsistency between thought and life; without that neither path would lead to the goal.

The Lord, while instructing Uddhava in Yoga, has clearly described the qualifications of the aspirants of the different Yoga paths. "With a view to effect liberation of men, I have inculcated three Yogas or methods, viz

those of knowledge, work, and devotion. There is no other means anywhere. Of these the path of knowledge is for those who have got disgusted with work and have renounced it; for those who have not become disgusted with it and desire its fruits, there is the path of work; but the path of devotion is for the man who somehow has got a veneration for talks about Me, and such other things, and who is neither disgusted with, nor grossly attached to work." If one reflects on these passages one will be able to find out easily for which Yoga one is fit. Very few indeed are those who have been able to give up sense-objects completely. Therefore, the number of those fit for the path of knowledge is small. Those who are very much attached to sense-objects cannot but work. But those who are midway, i.e., those who have not been able to give up completely sense-objects, and at the same time are not too much attached to them and have faith in the Lord and devotion to Him—if such practise the path of Bhakti, there is a great chance of knowledge being attained soon. This path of Bhakti is very easy and yields results soon. It begins with dualism, and in time when through the grace of the Lord perfection is attained in it, it ends in Advaita of itself. प्रीतिः परमं साधनम्

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